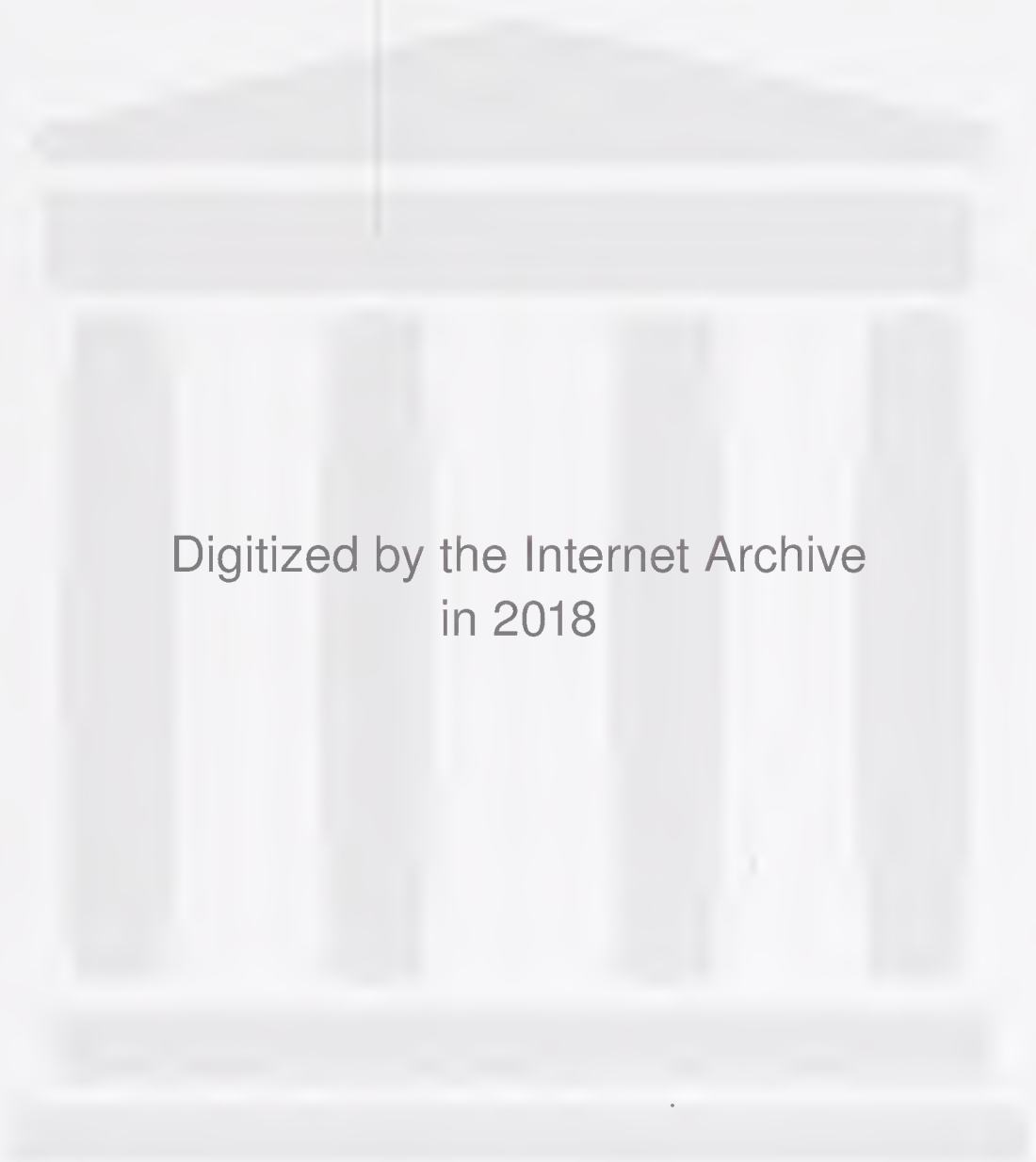


Celebration of Life

INDIAN FOLK DANCES

JIWAN PANI





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CELEBRATION OF LIFE INDIAN FOLK DANCES

Jiwan Pani



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THE VAST BODY OF INDIAN FOLK DANCES

Right from the day consciousness dawned on man, his highest and the most enduring aspiration has been to attain immortality by paralysing the ever moving claws of Death. So intense and pervading is the desire that all the inventions and progress man has made are, directly or indirectly, rooted to it. Three lines of the *Upanishads* very beautifully echo this aspiration: "Take me from this relative experience to that of the absolute. Take me from this domain of Death to that of the Immortality".

Even the primitive man in his awakened thought could clearly see that Life manifests itself in rhythm. Heartbeat, breathing, walking, all these signs of a living body are basically rhythmic. The difference between a living and a dead is that while the former has rhythm within him, the latter has no rhythm. Therefore his faculty of reasoning suggested to him that if he engages himself in some kind of exalted rhythmic activity, Life will be celebrated giving him a sense of immortality, even though for a while. And what rhythmic activity else than dance and music could be more exalted for celebrating Life? That is why man began dancing long before he learnt speaking some kind of dialect. Many scholars are therefore of the opinion that *dance* is the mother of all arts.

Pursuing his earliest and the ultimate aspiration, man has been trying unceasingly to conquer or transcend Death. He has not been successful, but he has found the way of having a secret sense of immortality in his mortal existence by immersing himself in dancing. This secret sense of immortality

is experienced at the deepest depth of the body. There is an eloquent tribal saying : "The tribe that dances never dies". Apparently, the tribals feel deep within that dancing is an activity that counteracts the forces of death. When Life is celebrated the moving claws of Death appears frozen.

Many tribal and non-tribal communities, who have not yet built a wall of artificiality between them and life, now also dance not to entertain an audience but to celebrate Life. These celebrative dances are now known as *folk* dances and the sophisticated highly evolved art dances as *classical*. This dichotomy is totally irrelevant in the context of Indian dances which have an amazing range and variety. The adjective *Classical* generally means, "of or pertaining to a style of art characterized by conformity to established treatments, taste, or critical standards, and by attention to form with the general effect of regularity, balance, proportion and controlled emotion, contrasted with the romantic". The styles of Indian dances which are classified as *classical*, are designated in Sanskrit or Hindi as *shaastriya-nritya* which means: 'a dance according to *shaashtra*'. The general meaning of *shaashtra* is : 'manual or compendium of rules'. In the context of Indian dance, *shaashtra* may be a written treatise or it may be entirely in oral tradition. For instance, for *Kathak*, the most important classical style of dance of North India, there is no written *shaashtra*. Also, the *shaashtra* claimed to have been written for the *Manipuri* style is not acceptable to many gurus of Manipur. The grammars of dance techniques for the said two classical styles of dance are well preserved in the oral traditions. The *shaastriyas* perpetuated in oral traditions should be given as much weight as the written ones, because we should not forget that the most revered of all scriptures, the *Vedas*, for centuries were faithfully preserved in the oral tradition. A style of classical dance, i.e. *shaastriya-nritya* may be defined as "the dance that strictly follows a conscious grammar of its own and is always performed before an audience". Some of the dances which are now classified as 'folk' are always performed before an audience, while others, especially the celebrative kind of dances do not presuppose an audience. For

instance, the *Chhau* dances of Eastern India, which are classed under 'folk' are always performed before an audience, and a few styles, such as, the *Mayurbhanj Chhau* and the *Seraikela Chhau*, have conscious grammars of their own. Thus the dichotomy of 'folk' and 'classical' creates good deal of confusion which could be considerably reduced if all those styles of dances performed always before an audience are classed under the designation of **Art dance** (in Hindi/Sanskrit *Kalaatmak-nritya*).

The class names of 'folk' and 'classical' have gained so much of currency that further confusion may be created if they are designated differently. Therefore, though not quite happy about it, we will accept the inappropriate class names for this book otherwise the readers may be more confused.

If Life is a boundless river, every dancer is a wave in it. The wave in its graceful rise and fall does celebrate the flow, but it requires a multitude of waves to celebrate the river. Therefore perhaps the folk dances are mostly performed by a group rather than a solo dancer. While dancing in unison with several other dancers each experiences that he or she has been multiplied and the Individual has become Universal. In the group dancing 'I' most ecstatically drowns itself in 'We' and all proper nouns sublimates into common nouns.

At a point of time deep in the prehistoric past, it surely occurred to some sensitive dancers that while celebrating Life through dancing they are at once celebrating the space and the time. Man, even when he was a cave dweller, could not tolerate the starkness of space and time. Therefore, despite the extremely tough mode of living, he painted the walls of the caves to lessen the starkness of space, and created the percussion music to do up the starkness of Time. The sensitive dancer endowed with the talent of dancing must have been thrilled to realise that dance can simultaneously decorate both space and time. Thus from the celebrative mood of dancing emerged the decorative

mood. When one does a decoration one wants it to be seen by others to appreciate. Thus the dancer who wished to decorate space and time desired an audience and do the decoration so intricately that the audience can not but admire it. When this newer aspect of dancing started evolving the embryo of **art dance** was being formed and again from the unified 'we' the 'I' raised its head. It was however not the egocentric but the magnificently creative 'I'.

The main aim of an art dancer is to show his or her individual excellence. He or she puts hours and hours of arduous practice to achieve that excellence, because the primary objective is to impress the audience so that the aesthetic experience is intense. The folk dancers, although they do decorate the space and time while celebrating life, do not aim at showing their excellence in dancing. It is the pulsating togetherness that they wish to enjoy deeply. Therefore, the folk dances have recurring movement which may appear to an art dancer repetitive and monotonous.

The range and variety of folk dance traditions surviving in India is indeed amazing. The sub-continent has around thirty different cultural regions. In each there are scores of differing styles of folk dances. This vast body of folk traditions can be mainly divided into two categories : dances performed by the tribal communities, and those by the non-tribal people. India has more than 460 different tribal communities and each has several kinds of dance traditions. All these tribal dances are either ritualistic or simply celebrative. The folk people have again two kinds of dance traditions : those which are performed basically for an audience and those which are, like the dances of the tribal communities, do not presuppose any audience.

The vast body of Indian folk dances can be further sub-divided according to the basic character or particular occasion of performance of the dance. They are :

1. Ritual dances
2. Trance dances

3. Ceremonial (including Funeral) dances
4. Harvest dances
5. Social dances
6. Seasonal dances
7. Martial and Game dances
8. Dances of Boys as Girls
9. Drum dances
10. Recreational dances

□□□

RELIGION AND FOLK DANCE

It is necessary to have a deeper understanding of the basic concept of the Hindu religion for better appreciation of Indian art and culture, because everything in this country is more or less associated with religion. It is not really a religion, and 'Hindu' is a misnomer. The originators of this religion named it *sanatana dharma*. In Sanskrit *sanatana* means eternal. *Dharma* is totally a different concept from religion. Literal meanings of both the words will reveal the difference of concept between the two. Religion is formed from the Latin roots *re* and *ligare*. *Re* means again or back, and *ligare* means bind or fasten. Therefore, religion literally means a kind of binding. Whereas *dharma* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *dhri* which means 'to hold'. The conceptual difference of 'holding' and 'binding' will be clear if it is said that home holds, but prison binds. Therefore, *sanatana dharma* literally means that which holds eternally. But what does it hold?

According to the traditional Indian thinking, inside a human being always there is a tug of war between the gods and the demons. A god is called *devata* and a goddess, *devi*. The verbal root of both these words is *div* which means 'to shine'. The gods are also called *sura*, derived from the root *sur* which means bright. The demons are called *asura* which means 'not bright', i.e., dark. The nobler aspects of a human being are considered bright and the baser aspects, dark. One of the most powerful baser aspects is the Ego. A *devata* is totally devoid of ego, whereas an *asura* is full of ego. Indian mythology is full of wars between the *devatas* and the *asuras*. The latter win when the former get a touch of ego and the domain of heaven comes under the rule of demons. When the

gods cast off their acquired ego they regain the rule of heaven called *svarga* meaning the domain of brightness. Inside a human being the same kind of war goes on always. It is extremely difficult for a human being to be totally devoid of ego unless the path of yoga is taken and its summit is reached. A person may not cast off the ego, but can remain without being egotistic. *Sanatana dharma* is that way of life that helps a person to remain non-egotistic, so that the brighter aspects outweigh the dark baser aspects. It is thus not a religion but a way of life and therefore totally secular in its perspective. It does not believe in religions. Therefore, there was no formal system of conversion into this *dharma*. Only at a very later stage dogmatism crept into the *dharma* and a kind of conversion was cooked up. What was *dharma* has now acquired the tint of a religion being seized by the priestly communities and politicians.

The Vedic culture was the foundation of the *sanatana dharma*. Great thinkers who lived in the vicinity of the Sindhu river originated the culture as well as the *dharma*. Some of the travellers and traders of Arab and Persia (now Iran) were the first outsiders to come in contact with the Vedic culture. Languages of that time of this region used to pronounce S as H. Therefore, they called the people living in the vicinity of the Sindhu river as the Hindus. They were the people who made the Vedic culture and the *dharma* known to the Europeans. Thus the *sanatana dharma* acquired the name of Hindu religion. Again, some of the Western languages pronounce H very softly. The river Sindhu while it was being called Hindu by the people of Middle East, in European languages it acquired the name of *Indus*. Thus *Bharat*, the country where the Sindhu river flowed, acquired the name of India.

The great thinkers and philosophers who shaped the *sanatana dharma* were called *rishis*. They were highly intuitive mystics. Through yogic meditation and introspection they had extremely deep spiritual experiences. They recorded their rich experiences in intensely metaphysical poetic lines in the Vedas and Upanishads. They were essentially absorbed in finding out the relationship between an individual human being and the vast surrounding cosmos. Also,

they wanted to know what is the connection between the flowing time and the eternity. Through deep meditation they positively experienced that there is a presence beyond time and space. They called this presence *Brahman*. The main aim of *sanatana dharma* is to experience, even for a moment, the eternal presence of the *Brahman*. They shaped the path of yoga for it, which is not easy for a common man to follow. They, however, realized that an artist can have a glimpse of the *Brahman* if he or she is totally immersed in the art. *Bhatta Nayaka*, a great aesthete of 9th-10th century A.D. maintained that aesthetic experience, being characterised by the immersion of the subject in the aesthetic object, to the exclusion of all else and therefore by a momentary interruption of his everyday life is akin to the beatitude of ecstasy or the experience of *Brahman*. The translation of what exactly Bhatta Nayaka says is, "The aesthetic relish is poured forth spontaneously by the artistic expression, like a cow, for love of her children; for this reason it is different from that which is (laboriously) milked by the yogins". According to the aesthete the experience of *Brahman* by the artist is somewhat superior to that of the yogins. Therefore, the great thinkers of *sanatana Dharma* made a calendar of *utsavas* in which artistic activities occupy an important place. *Utsava* is inappropriately translated into English as festival. The etymological analysis of the word will reveal its real meaning. The Sanskrit word *utsava* has been formed by joining *ut* with *sava*. The prepositional prefix *ut* means 'higher' and *sava* means 'to deliver'. (The delivery of a baby is called *prasava*, in which the prepositional prefix *pra* means 'intense'.) *Utsava*, therefore means delivering one at a higher mental state. Most of the *utsavas* are therefore associated with some rituals. Modern thinkers define a ritual as a symbolic enactment of a myth. All rituals performed at the time of holding an *utsava* have symbolic myths behind them. Owing to influence of alien cultures and drastic changes of social and political milieu over six centuries, most of the Indians have become ignorant about the symbolism of their rituals and mythology.

An Indian *utsava* has several aspects. Most of the folk dances are

performed as an essential aspect of the *utsava*. At times, the dancing itself is a ritual. There are different kinds of *utsavas*. While quite a few are associated with the agricultural operations, others are celebrations of the birthdays of some *devata/devi* or mythological celebrities. *Utsavas* are also held to celebrate the incoming or outgoing seasons.

For better appreciation of a form of folk dance, pains should be taken to find out what is the symbolism of the occasion on which the dance is performed traditionally. Many folk dances although can be performed at any time of the year or at any occasion, like the purely recreational dances, according to the tradition they are performed on particular occasions or *utsavas*.

□□□

RITUAL DANCES

In the previous chapter the close relationship between *dharma* and folk dances has been discussed. Till a few decades ago ritual was being considered as a customary act which is often repeated in the same form for a religious purpose. The social scientists of today define ritual as a symbolic enactment of a myth. Each of the Indian rituals is steeped in metaphysical symbolism contained in the myth behind it. If the symbolism of the myth is rightly understood, the ritual will appear as a poetic enactment; not an empty religious act. Again, myths also are now not considered as fantasies but stories or beliefs that attempt to express or explain a basic truth. Indian mythological literature is full of epic poems steeped in fascinating symbolism. Majority of legends prevalent in different parts of the country follow these epic poems and are highly symbolic in character. Many folk dances have been inspired by the mythology or legends. They are all basically not realistic. They are told by blending realism and poetic imagination to make the symbolism contained in them deeper and more intense. When these myths and legends are presented in stylized enactments through dance movements, they become as fascinating as aesthetic.

Lai Haroba

Literally *Lai Haroba* means 'festival of gods'. It is inspired by a local legend and the festival, through highly symbolic rituals and dances, create and demolish the cosmos. Several forms of dances are performed during the festival that lasts from ten to fifteen days. *Lai Haroba* of Manipur is conducted



Lai Haroba (Manipur)

by a special kind of priestess called *maibi* and priest called *maiba*. According to the legend, nine gods brought earth from heaven. Seven goddesses took the earth from the gods and threw it on the primordial ocean. On the first day of *Lai Haroba* these gods and goddesses are not only invoked but they take their symbolic birth from water. Two *maibis* wearing spotless white costume, along with villagers, go in a procession near a stream. Taking two new and empty earthen pots the *maibis* get into waist deep of water. Two leaves, symbolizing the male and female principles, are put in the water, one facing upwards and the other downward. It is imagined that the seed of creation is within the two leaves. The surface of the water of the stream is gently patted to make ripples which suggest the union of the male and female principles. Then the pairs of leaves are kept in each of the two earthen pitchers which are now filled with water. The *maibis* take the pitchers in procession to an improvised temple. The deities and the temple are made with wood, cane,

bamboo, and such other materials which can be burnt to ashes, because at the end of the festival everything is set to fire signifying the dissolution of the cosmos. The earthen pitchers are placed near the improvised temple. Symbolically the creation begins and a human being is born. Through dance movements and processions the life cycle and growth of human beings, agricultural operations etc are depicted in a stylized manner. Music for the various rituals and dances is provided by a simple stringed instrument called *pena* which is peculiar to the region. The festival concludes by burning the temple and everything used during the festival which, as said before, signifies the dissolution of the creation. In fact, a whole book can be written on the various rituals that are performed each day of the festival and the different myths and legends that inspire the rituals.

Karagam

Another fascinating dance tradition of the South, especially of Tamil Nadu, is *Karagam* (pronounced as *Kardgam*). In this dance also a pitcher is used as a ritual object and the dance is accompanied by a procession. In fact, throughout India in many a ritual and folk dance pitcher is used. It is because in puranic literature, especially in *Bhagavat Puran*, the human body is likened to an earthen pitcher since both are fragile. The water with which the pitcher is filled symbolizes life. In many forms of *pooja* (worship) a *mangal kalash* (auspicious pitcher) is sanctified at the beginning of the worship. This ritual symbolizes the ritualisation of the body of the worshipper. In *Karagam*, the main dancer balances on his head a pitcher filled with uncooked rice and water. Here the rice symbolizes food that sustains life and therefore sacred. The pitcher is mounted by a conical bamboo frame decorated with flowers. The dance begins from a place in the village which is considered auspicious. A procession follows the dancers. They go to the temple of *Mariamman*, the goddess of health and rain. She is the protector from the dreaded small pox and cholera. It is traditionally performed in August. The dance has interesting elements of acrobatics. The orchestra that accompanies the dance is called



Karagam (Tamil Nadu)

Niyandi Melam. It consists of *Thavil*, the drum , *Nadaswaram*, reeded wind instrument, *Muni*, *Udukkai*, *Pambai*, various types of drums etc. Earlier only male dancers were performing this dance. Nowadays female dancers also participate.

Tendong-faat

Tendong-faat, a ritual dance of the Lepcha tribe of Sikkim, is an example of dances inspired by local legends. It is performed on the 15th day of the seventh month of Buddhist lunar calendar corresponding to August/September. The dance is performed as a worship of the Tendong hill. The local legend associated with this annual dance performance runs as follows :

Long long ago the mighty *Teesta* and *Rangit* rivers were in full spate.

The water level rose to such a great height that even the hills were drowned. Men, women, children, and animals were swept away by the flood. The Lepchas of the Tendong hill then began praying the God. They were so sincere in their prayer that the God was pleased and appeared before them as a large *Kohomfo* bird and began sprinkling *chhang*, a kind of millet beer, on the rivers. It had a miraculous effect. The moment the *chhang* drops fell on the rivers the level of water started receding rapidly. Soon the flood was over and the people returned to their homes and the divine bird flew back to heaven. The Lepchas commemorate the event by worshipping, through dance the Tending hill which gave shelter to their forefathers at the time of great calamity.

Both men and women participate in the dancing and the musical accompaniment is provided by *Palit* (flute), *Tembak* (string instrument), *Tindar* (drum), and *Romu* (cymbal).

Popir

The Adi tribal community of Siang district in Arunachal Pradesh holds a festival to propitiate *Mopin*, the deity of prosperity. One of the important part of the festival is the sacrifice of a *Mithun*, a kind of animal peculiar to this region. The sacrifice is followed by a dance called *Popir*. The *Mopin* priest leads the dance and three or four dancers follow him. The *Popir* dancers use costumes made of bamboo shearings and leaves, sprinkled with rice-powder. They also wear shawls and flower decorations.

Cheraw

In the Union Territory of Mizoram the most popular dance is *Cheraw*. It is danced mainly by the girls of Mizo tribe. Although it is now performed at any time, originally it was a ritual dance. It is inspired by a Mizo myth, according to which *Pu Pawla* is the custodian of paradise. When a child dies, the spirit proceed towards *Pialral*, the heavenly abode of the dead. The *Cheraw* dance is performed to propitiate the death of the child. The Mizos believe that if



Cheraw (Mizoram)

the dance is performed the spirit of the dead child will easily enter into the paradise without being harassed by *Pu Pawla*.

The *Cheraw* is a dance of skill involving quick reflexes with matching deftness of feet. Mizo girls wearing their traditional colourful skirts, matching blouses, and headgears decorated with beads and feathers dance *Cheraw*. Non-dancer boys or girls squat on the ground holding long bamboo poles. A pair of non-dancers holds a pair of bamboo poles and squat facing each other,

Usually three pairs of non-dancers hold horizontally three pairs of bamboo poles. Other three pairs hold the bamboo poles vertically. They hold the bamboos in such a way that when the poles are held apart squarish dancing spaces are created on the ground. In each square stands a dancer. She has to step out of the square when the poles are clapped. The poles are clapped rhythmically and the dancers alternately step in and out of the squares keeping to the clapping of the poles that provides the rhythm for the dance. A gong is sounded for change in the stepping pattern.

Tirayattam

Tirayattam is a fascinating form of ritual dance of Kerala. According to local myths *Bhagavati*, the mother-goddess and Lord *Shiva* take various incarnations to terminate the demonic forces. The dancers impersonate the various incarnations of the god and goddess. When a dancer wears the complete highly stylized make-up and equally colourful costume, he is called by the generic name of *kolam*. Some of the Shaivite *kolams* are : *Bhairavan*, *Ghantakaran*, *Kayatan*, etc. Some of the *Bhagavati kolams* are : *Bhadrakali*, *Bhairavi*, *Odakali*, *Raktesvari*, etc. Each important *kolam* is presented by in 3 stages of development. The childhood phase when presented by a *kolam* it is called *Vellattam*. The phase of old age is called *Chantattam*. The most important phase is the youth which is known as *Tirayattam*. Before the *Tirayattam* begins there is a musical prologue. The music of drums and cymbals which is played first is called *Tayambaka*. Next comes the *Kuzhalpoot* music of the reeded pipes after which the *Tirayattam* begins. It is a dance form which has powerful dramatic elements.

Jhika-Dasain

The *Jhika-Dasain* is a form of worship dance practised by the Santal tribe to train young men of the community in the art of acquiring spiritual powers to dispel the influence of the evil spirits. The training lasts for several days but the occasion when the spiritual powers are attained is rejoiced with

night long *Lagren* dance in which women also participate.

A few days before Dassera this dance is performed. It is prohibited to sing even any part of the songs accompanying the dance and to perform it after Dassera. There are five different kinds of dances which come under *Jhika-Dasain*. In every kind the idiophone *Jhika* dominates, hence the name. The other musical instruments played with the dance are : *Madar*, a cylindrical drum, *Nagade*, a hemispherical single face drum, and *Jhal*, the cymbals. Musicians also wear straps of jingle bells as crossbelt. The dance is performed before every house in the village and it is customary for the housewife to offer some grains to the dancers, which are finally sold for purchasing necessary materials for worshipping the goddess *Manasa* and the guru.

Ariba Pala

Ariba Pala is another unique form of dance prevalent in Manipur. *Lai Haroba* discussed earlier is quite ancient and reflects the *Meitei* culture that was much influenced by Tantrism. *Ariba Pala* evolved after Vaishnavism swayed the region around four centuries ago. Both vocal singing and the percussion music of the drum called *Pung* are the life breath of *Ariba Pala*.

The group consists of 16 performers. They are divided into two sub-groups. One is led by the main singer called *Isei Hanba*. The other is led by *Dubar*. The latter group answers the questions asked by the former group. There are two *pung* (drum) players whose role in the performance is quite important. The performance does not begin until the *Mandava Mapu* takes his specified seat. He is a very senior artist who has deep technical knowledge about *Ariba Pala*. He presides over the performance. As soon as he takes his seat the two drummers enter into the arena of performance. They play a few exquisite passages of percussion music. Then the two groups already seated inside the arena in a semi-circular manner, get up and the *Isei Hanba* begins the invocatory song. The performers imagine that they are in Nabadwip, the birth place of *Shri Chaitanyadev*, the great Vaishnava saint. It is his life that is de-

picted by the performers through superb singing, drumming, and dancing. The performance has very subdued elements of theatre and it is so controlled and well-knit that it can easily vie with any classical style.

Lankhon Phuza

Lankhon Phuza is another ritualistic dance performed by the Lalung tribe of the Nowgong district in Assam. *Lankhon* means bamboo and *Phuza* means worship. The Lalung tribe worships bamboos for a bumper crop. In the flora of Assam, bamboo occupies a significant place. No wonder that for the Lalung tribe this tall and stout grass rising high into the sky is a symbol of divinity. This dance is performed well before the harvest around the month of November. In this dance twenty- one bamboo poles are beautifully decorated with a kind of straw. The dancers wearing their traditional dresses dance to the percussion music provided by cylindrical two face drums. The dancers rhythmically thrust the decorated bamboo poles up towards the sky. It appears as if they are transmitting their prayer for a bumper crop heaven-ward through the tall bamboo poles.

Every region of this country has scores of ritual dances. Only a few representative forms of ritual dances have been discussed to illustrate how myth, legend, and poetic symbolism inspire this kind of dances.

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TRANCE DANCES

Trance or spirit dances are different from ritual dances, although superficially it may appear same. In a trance dance the dancer becomes a temporary embodiment of either a spirit or a deity; whereas in a ritual dance the dancers are either worshippers or ritual objects. In a ritual, many kinds of inanimate materials like incense, joss stick, *kusha* grass, burning lamps, etc. and inanimate objects like mask, idol, icon, etc are used. In a ritual dance the dancers are animate ritual objects. In a trance dance rituals are performed either by a priest or the dancer himself with the sole aim of invoking a spirit or a deity to possess the body of the dancer. Once possessed the dancer is transformed into the invoked spirit or deity. He also behaves and talks that way. One should not doubt that the dancer gets possessed or think that he just puts on an act. It is a kind of self-hypnosis under which the dancer goes into a deep trance. It is deeper than the *Sattwik-abhinaya* which is nothing but an actor's total empathy with the portrayed character. For instance, in an intensely tragic dramatic situation actual tears come out from the eyes of an actor. This is called in *Natyashastra* as *sattwik-abhinaya*. It can only happen when the actor totally identifies with the character he portrays. The difference between *sattwik-abhinaya* and *trance* is that in the former case it is the inherent histrionic talent of the actor that brings about the total empathy, whereas in the case of *trance* it is most probably self-hypnosis. Again, the rural people, who have not been yet contaminated by the industrial civilization, look upon the everyday reality and mythological reality as the two sides of the same coin. For them such mythological characters as Rama and Krishna are like next

door neighbours. If history tells of things past, mythology tells simultaneously of past, present, and future. The psyche of the rural people is steeped with mythological reality. That is why neither the trance dancer nor the onlookers doubt the reality of a spirit or a deity taking possession of the trance dancer's body.

Bhoota

The *Bhoota* dance of Karnataka is one of the examples of trance dance. *Bhoota* means a spirit. In South Kanara, especially the *Tulu* community, perform this dance. They believe that there are particular spirits who if invoked to enter into the body of the dancer, many evils and calamities that may befall on the community will be averted. Almost every village in the South Kanara district has a *Bhoota Sana*. Derived from the Sanskritized word *sthaana*, *Sana* means a place. Surrounded by thick bushes and trees, stands a small structure with tiled roof and without any windows. In front of the structure there are a few T-shaped poles. Inside there are a few brass images suggesting human and animal figures. This is the *Bhoota Sana*, the abode of the spirits. There are also swords and flywhisks. The images are worshipped with only *kapala* flowers.

The dance is performed on moonlit nights. The *Bhoota* dancer wears a highly stylized make-up and costume. There are quite a few variant forms of the *Bhoota* dance. In some variant styles the dancer, instead of stylized facial make-up, wears a wooden mask. The flowing skirt of the *Bhoota* dancer is made of strips of palm leaf. The torso is covered with broad necklaces of nuts and beads. The dancer wears a conical headgear decorated with tinsel and tiny mirrors that dazzle when light falls on them. The face is given a mask like make up with lines that give the face a kind of weird look. The accompanying music is very loud and is provided by drums, pipes and brass clappers. The music is punctuated with prose passages. When the *Bhoota* dancer gets possessed by the invoked spirit, he tells many things of past, present and future.

According to his advice even some village disputes are settled. The deified dancer promises prosperity for the villagers and finally pronounces that the tradition will be continued for ever.

Jagar

In North India, Kumaon and Garhwal region has a variety of trance dances; the leading one is called *Jagar*. It is inspired by a local legend. The legend runs as follows :

Once upon a time, there was a very beautiful Brahmin girl by the name Bhana Joshi. The prince of the kingdom fell in love with her. Both loved each other so deeply that ignoring the caste barrier the prince wanted to marry her. When none of them could be dissuaded to part with, they were killed.

This tragic love story has inspired the *Jagar* trance dance. It is danced both by men and women. A vocalist sings the ballad when the dancers gesturally depict the story. The dance culminates in invoking the spirits of Bhana and her lover-prince. The dancers then go into a trance. Finally, a priest performs some rituals to send the spirits back to their heavenly abode to rest in peace.

Kanchani Nritya

Another variant of *Jagar* dance is called *Kanchani Nritya*. It is inspired by the legend of Ramola, a version of Krishna. In this trance dance only women perform. The dancers wear colourful skirts and they take very fast pirouettes to convey a feeling of great ecstasy that puts them into a trance.

Bhaktas

The trance dance connected with the *Chaitra Parba*, as celebrated in Mayurbhanj of Orissa and in Seraikela of Bihar, is totally different from the trance dances so far discussed. The well known *Chhau* dances are also performed as another part of the *Chaitra Parba*. In the lunar calendar *Chaitra*,

corresponding to March/April, is the last month of the year. The last day of the month falls on 13th April. The Indian New Year begins from 14th April. The last 15 days of the month of *Chaitra* is celebrated as the *Chaitra Parba* both by the tribal as well as the non-tribal communities. The tribals celebrate it in a different way. The celebration of non-tribal communities has several components. The performance of *Chhau* dances on the last two days of the month is one of the components. The way the *Bhaktas*, a special kind of Shaivite devotees, observe the *Parba* is another component. The *Bhaktas* belong to the caste of *Teli* (oilman) which is a lower rung of the caste ladder. Thirteen hereditary members of the *Teli* caste observe the *Parba* in quite austere manner for about 15 days. On the first day they perform a ritual to belong to the Shiva *gotra* (lineage). From that day they wear sacred threads like the Brahmins till the end of the *Parba*. They take only one meal a day and perform some rituals daily in the afternoon after taking ritual bath in a river. The rituals of the last four days are extremely arduous. After taking the ritual bath the *Bhaktas* go to the temple of mother goddess and from there to the place of the ritual. Their leader goes into trance and shakes his head rhythmically to the beat of the drums. Then they roll on tough thorns but their bodies do not show any prick mark of the thorns. This is called *Kanta-paat*. The next day they do the same rituals but lastly they walk on burning coke. It is called *nian-patt*. Next day the last ritual is called *jhoola-paat* in which the *Bhaktas*, one after another, hang themselves upside down over burning fire. The last day ritual is called *udaa-paat* in which the devotees gyrate high above the ground tied to a T-shaped pole. The leader while gyrating releases a pigeon which he would be holding with both hands. This release of the pigeon is the symbol of the release of the soul from the *Maya*.

There is yet another trance dance connected with the *Chaitra Parva*. On the 26th Day of the month of *Chaitra* an earthen pot filled with water is brought out in a procession. The pitcher is called *Jatra-ghata*. The bearer of the *ghata* (pitcher) goes into a trance and dances to the music provided by *Dhols*, the

barrel-shaped drums, and *Mahuris*, reeded wind instruments. There is yet another pitcher that the *Bhaktas* bring at midnight to the arena where *chhau* dances are being presented. This pitcher is called *Nishi* (night) or *Kamana* (desire) *ghata*. The symbolism of pitcher filled with water has been discussed under the ritual dance named *Karagam*. Here also the symbolism is the same. When the *Bhaktas* with the *Nishi-ghata* come to the *Chhau* stage, the orchestra plays a particular tune and the *Bhaktas* dance with simple typical stepping for a while. It is believed that the *Nishi-ghata* sanctifies the *Chhau* stage. Both the *ghata* and the face of its bearer are painted red with vermilion mixed with oil. In Tantrik rituals while vermilion represents the menstrual blood which is the symbol of the creative energy of the female principle, the sandalwood paste represents semen the symbol of male force that makes the creative energy functional. The creative energy is spread from procreative to artistic creativity. The *Nishi-ghata* painted red with vermilion symbolizes the blessing of the mother goddess for richer artistic activity.

Kavadi

The *Kavadi* is the trance dance of Tamil Nadu. *Kavadi* is a wooden shaft with two triangular conical bamboo frames tied to both the ends. The pilgrims to the temple of Lord Muruga at Palani carry these *Kavadis* on their shoulder putting milk or scented water pots in the bamboo frames. They go in a procession, all the way singing and dancing to the music provided by *Nadaswaram*, the reeded wind instrument, and *Thavil*, the drum. A legend is associated with this Pilgrimage. According to the legend, Idumban was a giant. He uprooted two hillocks and tied them to the two ends of a pole. He then lifted and slung it from his shoulder. Appreciating the great prowess of the giant, Lord Muruga (son of Shiva, also known as Subramanya, and in North India as Kartik) appointed him as chief assistant. Therefore, Idumban is first worshipped before the worship of Lord Muruga. The *Kavadis* represent Idumban's sling with two hillocks. Hundreds of pilgrims carrying these *Kavadis* go on pilgrimage to the Lord Muruga temple. The pilgrimage procession

stops when one or more are seen dancing in a slower tempo. The pilgrim dances for some time shifting the *Kavadi* skillfully from one shoulder to another. The tempo rises and when the dancers fall into a trance they put the *Kavadis* on ground and allow themselves to be tortured. It is believed that those who are in trance have been possessed by evil spirits. They are tortured for the purification of their bodies.

Maibi

The trance dance of *maibi* of Manipur in connection with the *Lai Haroba* festival is totally different as it is not only very graceful but aesthetically satisfying also. *Maibis* are a class of priestesses. Anyone can not be a *maibi* unless she shows definite signs of being spiritually predisposed. She may



Maibi (Manipur)

show the signs of spiritual predisposition at a tender age or when she is an adult. She is then selected to be a *maibi* and lead the rest of her life the way prescribed for a *maibi*.

The *maibi* dance begins from the kneeling position. Very slowly she rises holding the knees always close. She holds both her hands near the navel with both thumbs and forefingers touching each other. Between the forefinger and middle finger she holds a leaf of a sacred plant. The dance movements are all slow, controlled, and lyrical. Right from the beginning of the dance the *maibi* is in trance. Slowly rising while moving like a spiral when she comes to the erect position, with controlled and elegant stepping she moves like the figure of eight which symbolizes the *Nagamandala*, the Tantrik *yantra*. Although it is a dance in trance the aesthetic quality is no less than any classical dancing.

Teyyam

The *Teyyam* and *Mudiettu* of Kerala also come under the category of trance dance. The elements of theater are so pronounced in them that they are



Teyyam (Kerala)

considered forms of ritual theatre. In Indian performing art traditions, theatre and dance are inseparable. *Kathakali* of Kerala is generally regarded as a form of classical dance, but if it is examined carefully one will come to the conclusion that it is basically a theatre. The difference between a group dance and theatre is that while the former may have narrative elements as theme, the latter has a definite plot and gradual development of character along the story line, which *Kathakali* has. Plays are specially written for *Kathakali* and they are called *atta-kathas*. In *Manipuri Raasa* dances Krishna while dancing with the Gopikas, suddenly vanish. Gopikas are heart broken. Krishna finally comes back and performs the *raasa* dances with the Gopikas. It is not a plot. It is a theme which is narrative in character. Considering from this perspective, one may say that *Mudiettu* has a plot of how the goddess Kali vanquishes the demon Darika in a fight. But the *Teyyam* does not have a definite plot. There are, of course, narrative elements which are quite dramatic. Therefore, we will consider *Teyyam* more a dance than a theatre.

Teyyam is derived from the word *daivam* meaning god. Each of the dancers is possessed either by a god or by an exalted legendary hero. *Teyyam* is widely in vogue in North Kerala, particularly in Cannanore district. When the dancer wears the full make-up and costume he is called a *Teyyam*. The make-up and costume, which are highly stylized, differ according to the *Teyyam* the dancer is required to represent. There are about 150 *Teyyams* in the traditional repertoire. The face of the dancer is given a mask like make-up with different bright colours. Each wear a towering and colourful headgear. At times, the headgear may be several feet high. The skirt is usually heavily pleated silk cloth. The dancers also wear many kinds of decorations made of tender fronds of coconut. The *Teyyam* with all these and heavy bangles and garlands, appear much larger-than-life. After donning the costume the *Teyyam* goes through a ritual during which the invocatory chanting called *Tottam* is sung. This is for invoking the particular deity to enter into the body of the dancer. The dancer then executes some dance movements in slow tempo.

Gradually the tempo becomes faster and faster and becomes a frenzied dancing leading to the trance.

Trance dances are becoming weaker day by day. It is so because the mind of the dancer at times is not that impression-able as the values of industrial civilization are creeping in to weaken the strength of the faith he had earlier for the deities. Keeping the dance movements and connected things quite authentic the dancer may, at times, feign the trance part of it.



CEREMONIAL DANCES

There are two kinds of ceremonies : religious and social. In this chapter dances performed on the occasion of important religious ceremonies will be discussed. In the next chapter dances performed during social ceremonies will be discussed. The ceremonial dances have ritualistic overtones and are celebrative in character. While some of the dances have fascinating symbolism, others only celebrate important religious occasions.

Garba

One of the interesting ceremonial dances is *Garba* of Gujarat. It is performed on the occasion of *Navaratra*, a religious ceremony deeply influenced by Tantrism. *Navaratra* is observed with great solemnity, especially in Gujarat, before Diwali in the lunar month of Kartik, corresponding to October/November. During this religious observance the women folk of Gujarat perform *Garba*, derived from the word '*Garbha*', meaning the womb. A clarified-butter-fed *pradeep* (lamp) is put inside an earthen pitcher with holes all around it. This pitcher with the lamp inside it symbolises the womb of the mother goddess charged with creative energy and the lamp signifies the seed of creation. This pitcher with the lamp is called *garbi*. It is placed inside a decorated wooden structure called *mandavi*. One or two girls each carrying on her head the *mandavi* with the *garbi* and followed by the other dancers go from house to house. On reaching the premises of a household the *mandavi* is put on the ground and the dancers dance around it. While dancing they sing *garba* songs which were written long long ago. The percussion music is



Garba (Gujarat)

provided by the drum called *dholak*. *Garba* songs are tuneful and the dancing is fascinatingly lyrical. There are various kinds of *Garba* which are danced by girls of every caste and community.

The men folk of Gujarat perform *Raas* dances on this occasion. Basically, however, *Raas* dances are connected with agricultural operations. Therefore, it will be discussed under the Harvest Dances.

Pata-da Kunita.

The *Pata-da Kunita* of Karnataka is traditionally performed at the time when a village deity is taken out on ceremonial occasions. The dance having deep religious association is believed to have originated from Vaishnavite rites. *Pata-da Kunita* literally means the dance of the *Patras* which are 10 to 15 feet long bamboo poles decorated with colorful silken ribbons and with a small umbrella made of either silver or brass fixed on top end of each pillar. The dancers wearing red *dhotis*, folded scarves slung crosswise from left shoul-



Pata-da-Kunita (Karnataka)

der to right side waist, and garlands, each holds a *Pata*, the lower end of which is put inside a bag of cotton fabric slung from the shoulder. While dancing, the dancers form various choreographic patterns. Some of the dance movements have elements of acrobatics. The percussion music is provided by two kinds of native drums, namely, *Tamte* and *Nagarika*.

Guravayyalu

The *Guravayyalu* ceremonial dance is performed by the priests of *Kurava* caste who mainly live in the Anantapur and Kurnool districts of Andhra Pradesh. It is strongly influenced by shaivism since the songs that accompany the dance eulogises Lord Shiva. The dancers put on a typical costume made of bear skin with hair. Each dancer holds and plays while dancing a small hourglass shaped



Guravayyalu (Andhra Pradesh)

drum called *Damarukam* and a bamboo flute. Jingle bells (*ghungroo*) are tied to the waist, knees, and ankles of each dancer who also holds a trident. From one of his shoulders hangs a small bag made of deer skin. The bag contains *prasad* (offering) offered to Lord Shiva.

Chawnglaizuan

The *Chawnglaizuan* is a ceremonial dance of unique kind. It may be called a funeral dance, since it is performed when the village chief or a very well-to-do person of the village dies. This custom is prevalent among the people of the *Pawi* tribal community. *Chawnglaizuan* literally means dance and jump for glory. The Pawis regard two days most important in a man's life : the day he is born and the day he dies. It is a kind of homage the villagers pay to the dead chief who is glorified in the dance. The members of the chief's family give pigs and fowls to the villagers as gifts, which are killed for a sumptuous feast. Earlier the dance was being performed by only one dancer. He used to carry a gun and while dancing and singing used fire shots upward occasionally. In course

of time the dance changed considerably and now it is performed usually by 16 men and 16 women dancers. About five musicians provide the accompanying percussion music playing different sizes of gongs and drums.

Dhangar

Dhangar is a shepherd community who migrated long ago from the Saurashtra region and have settled in the hilly regions of north and north-western parts of Goa. Their presiding deity is *Bira Deva*. The community still retains some of the customs of the region they earlier belonged to. They, like the people of Gujarat, observe *Navaratra* with great zeal and earnestness. In this nine-day long religious observance the head of the family fasts throughout taking only a cup of milk everyday. On the tenth day all the families observing *Navaratra* bring their family deities to a particular place where the ceremonial dance is performed with great devotion. The *Dhangar* dance is performed only by men. Each dancer wears the ceremonial dress : white *dhoti*, white *kurta* with red embroidery and a turban. The dance is vigorous as it is performed with devotional zeal. The music which is predominantly percussive is provided by *Dhol*, a barrel-shaped drum, *Thaang*, a pair of cymbals, and a drone called *Taso*.

Pookkavadi

The *Pookkavadi* ceremonial dance is mainly performed by the Kudumbi, Ezhava and Nair communities of Trichur district in Kerala. *Pookkavadi* literally means floral arches. This dance originated as a component of *Ambalakkavadi*, a religious procession in which the model of a temple is ceremonially carried. The dancers of *Pookkavadi* accompany the procession carrying on their heads or shoulders arch - like structures made of colourful paper flowers. The dancers dance in circular formation and in faster tempo. The dance enhances the grandeur of the procession.

Kolam Tullal

The *Kolam Tullal* is another fascinating ceremonial dance of Kerala. *Kolam*

is a highly stylized and colourful mask or headgear or both unified into one. The dancer or actor who wears this, together with appropriate costume is also called a *kolam*. In *Kolam Tullal* dancers wearing different kinds of *kolams* perform. This dance has a deep association with the Bhagavati cult. The *Kolam* dancers are brought in a procession by a number of traditionally dressed young girls. Each of them holds a plate of offerings in one hand and an oil-fed lamp in another. The priest wearing jingle bells on his ankles accompany the procession. The *Kolams* are brought to the stage tastefully decorated with banana stems and lampsteads. It is believed that the *kolams* are titans sent by Lord Shiva to terminate the evils of the society and bring prosperity. Percussion music is provided by drums, such as, *Chenda*, *Maddalam*, *Timila* and idiophones like gong and cymbals. The percussion music is punctuated by the sound of horns called *Kompu*. The music is loud and pulsating and the dance is performed with increasing tempo till it becomes frenzied.

Karma

Karma dance is performed by many tribal communities living in Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh, in varying forms and styles. One factor is common that the ceremony of *Karma* is performed to bring prosperity to the community and a branch of *Karma* tree is brought and planted around which the dance is performed. Although it is basically a tribal ceremony, a few non-tribal communities also observe it.

Invariably a legend is associated with each style of *Karma* dance. The *karma* legend associated with the dance prevalent in eastern Madhya Pradesh runs as follows :

Once upon a time there was a very benevolent king by name Karmachand. When he was defeated by the army of the neighbouring kingdom he fled to the forest. One day he saw some lamps burning at a distance. The king was surprised and went near

the lamps. He found that a god was sitting on his throne and young girls are dancing before him. The moment they saw the king they vanished. Karamchand went and fell prostrated at the feet of the god who asked him what he wanted. The king begged the god to return his kingdom to him. The god said that if the king performs *Karmapooja* he will get back his kingdom. As advised by the god, Karmachand sent unmarried girls to bring a branch of the *Karma* (*kadam*) tree which was planted on a sanctified place. The branch was worshipped and the *Karma* dance was performed throughout the night. In the morning the branch was ritually floated down the



Karma (Madhya Pradesh)

river. Immediately the king got the news that his enemies have fled the kingdom. He thus got back his throne. Those who want to avert their misfortune should observe the *Karma* ceremony exactly as the king did.

The *Karma* ceremony is held in the lunar month of *Ashwin*, corresponding to September/October. In the eastern Madhya Pradesh it is performed thrice. The first is held on third day of *Ashwin*. In this only unmarried girls take part. The second is held on the eleventh day in which both unmarried girls and boys participate. The third is observed just twelve days after the second in which women also take part, irrespective of whether married or unmarried. The rituals and dance remain the same for all the three observances.

The *Karma* observed by the tribal communities of Chhatisgarh is associated with a legend which is different and has some similarity with that prevalent in Orissa.

Both tribal and non-tribal communities living in the district of Sambalpur and Phulbani in Orissa observe the *Karma* festival. Here the ceremony also includes some entertaining items. The legend associated with the *Karma* of Orissa is as follows :

Six sons of a rich merchant set sail in a ship for trade, leaving the youngest at home. When they returned they found that their wives are dancing *Karma* dance and the youngest brother is playing the drum. Enraged they drove away their wives. The *karma* god was angry and the wealth of the six brothers vanished. They went to the god and prayed that their wealth may be restored to them. The god said that if they take back their wives and continue to observe the *Karma* they will regain their vanished wealth. They did exactly as the god wanted them to do and they got back their wealth. From that day *Karma* festival is being celebrated every year in the month of *Ashwin*.

In Bihar also a few non-tribal communities like Mahato, Malah, Chamar, etc. observe the *Karma* ceremony like the tribals, but it is held during the rainy season and related to transplanting of paddy.

Lahaw

On the picturesque hills of Assam lives the comely and sturdy Jaintia tribal community. They perform a ceremonial dance called *Lahaw*. It is associated with the worship of goddess Rangkit and is performed as an invocation to grant prosperity to the tribe. First the instrumental music is played. The orchestra consists of drums, flute, and cymbal. After a while the women dancers enter the dancing arena. They come tiptoeing. They are followed by the male dancers. The group then forms several units. Each unit has three dancers; one female dancer is flanked on both sides by two male dancers. These units make a pattern that is somewhat diagonal. The men wear *dhoti*, *kurta*, and waist-coats. Each of them wears a colourful turban. The girls wear, richly embroidered silk skirts shawls and sashes. They also wear necklaces of various kinds of beads. The dance is accompanied by singing and instrumental music. Two singers lead, the lines are then sung in chorus. The dance is distinctive for its graceful swaying movements and slow tempo.

Baredi

The *Baredi* dance is performed by the dancers of *Abeer* community of Madhya Pradesh. They are also called *Yadavas*. The dance is believed to have originated by Krishna who belonged to this community of cowherds. It is performed every year just the day after the Diwali festival and danced everyday for a fortnight, i.e., till the night of the full moon. On the first day, the deity called *Dulhadev* is worshipped. Then the seniormost member of the group puts on the forehead of each dancer a dot of sandalwood paste mixed with turmeric. The dancers wear colourful costumes and decorate themselves with ornaments made of cowries. They first perform before *Dulhadev* and then go and dance before every household of the village. The songs that

accompany the dance usually pray God to protect and increase the cows and to bestow prosperity on the community. The instrumental music is provided by drums called *dhol* and *nagada* and flutes. At times *mridang* is played instead of *dhol*.

Chilori

Another ceremonial dance of Madhya Pradesh is *Chilori*. It is a dance performed by girls of tribal communities and in the age group of twelve to sixteen. Usually, sixteen to twenty dancers participate in the dance. It is danced twice every year a fortnight before Diwali and Holi festivals. It is danced everyday till the day of the festival. There is a particular place called *akhraa* where the dance is performed. The dancers make a circle each holding other's waist. While dancing the dancers sway alternately to the left and to the right. They wear flowers on the temples above the ears and tie jinglebells (*ghungroo*) on their ankles. They begin the dance in slower tempo which goes on increasing gradually. They sing while dancing and the songs are called *chilori-siring*. At the end of each line of the song the dancers take a jump and hit the ground hard with both the feet. No musical instrument is played with the dance. Only on very special occasions *Dhol*, the drum and *Jhanj*, the cymbals are played to provide the rhythm.

Hiroria

While *Chilori* is the dance of only girls, the *Hiroria* of Madhya Pradesh is a dance of men only. It is performed in the lunar month of Shravan, corresponding to July/August. It is also known as *Dandaa-nritya*, because the dancers hold batons in both their hands and while dancing in circular movement hit the batons held by the nearest dancer. It is somewhat similar to the *Dandia Raas* of Gujarat. The dancers make various kinds of choreographic patterns. Musical accompaniment is provided by *Dhol* and *Timki*, the drums, flute, cymbals, and *Chitkora*, a kind of castanets. Songs accompanying the dance is called *hiroria-siring*. When the rhythm changes, the choreographic pattern also change.

Tarangmel

The *Tarangmel* of Goa is danced on the occasion of Dussehra and Holi festivals. The youth of Goa swarm the streets in colourful groups waving flags and streamers (*tarang*) inspring and inviting one and all to imbibe the festive spirit. The spirited youth shout Ho ! Ho! to the rhythmic beat of the percussion music provided by *Romut*, *Dhol* and *Tasha*. A colourful atmosphere is created by the colourful costumes the dancers wear and the varied hues of the flags and streamers they carry.

Chham Chhank

The Lamas of Lahul Spiti region of Himachal Pradesh perform *Chham Chhank* ceremonial dance related to their *Chakhar* festival which is held once in three years to pay tribute to the Buddha. The dancers wear a typical head-gear called *Chhank*, after which the dance is named. The costume made of golden, black and yellow cloth decorated with traditional motifs in patch work is very distinctive. Some dancers carry swords and others knives while covering half their faces with a piece of black cloth. It is a very slow moving dance with circular movements and accompanied by musical instruments like *Tangchim*, a long straight trumpet, and *Ghhan*, a barrel-shaped drum. The musicians wear the traditional Lama *libas* along with beautiful headgear with yellow feathers.

Garadi

The *Garadi dance* of Pondicherry traces its origin to the ancient days of Ramayana, when the *Vanara* army performed this dance to celebrate the victory of Rama over Ravana. It is mainly performed at the time of the car festival of Lord Vishnu. The dance continues for five to eight hours every night. The distinctive feature of this dance is the iron rings, called *anjali*, which the dancers wear, ten on each leg. As the dancers execute intricate movements, the rings produce sweet sonorous sound. The dancers carry flags in their hands. They dance to the beats of two huge drums called *Ramadolu*. The drum is hemispherical with a diameter of about eight feet.

Rikhampada

Rikhampada is a dance of Nishi tribe of lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. It is believed that this dance and the *Nyokum* festival were introduced by one of their forefathers named *Apatani*, when he along with his tribe migrated to the present place of settlement. The dance is accompanied by songs in the form of ballads narrating legends of love. It is performed by women only to express their love for their husbands and to offer their reverence to the gods.

Suggi Kunita

In Karnatak the ceremonial dances with ritualistic overtones are called by the generic name of *Kunita*. The *Pat-da Kunita* has already been discussed in this chapter. Another such dance is *Suggi Kunita*. It is performed by the farming *Halaki Vokkaligas* of the North Kanara. The *Suggi* procession is taken out on the occasion of *Kamana Hunnime* amidst elaborate arrangements. The headgear of the dancers, called *Turayi*, looks like birds perched on crop and is particularly eye catching. Each dancer holds a small stick and a bouquet of peacock feathers in his right hand. The singing and dancing *suggi* procession is greeted in every house with *aarti*. When the procession returns, *Karma* is burnt, followed by festivities. The *Suggi Kunita* is believed to eradicate diseases in the village, bring rains and fulfil the wishes of the people.

Kokali-kattai

Kokali-kattai is a form of stilt dance prevalent in the North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. The dance has religious associations since it is traditionally performed during a festival held in honour of *Mariamamma*, the mother goddess. The dance is named after the stilt which is called *kokali-kattai*. It is about three feet high and is tied to each foot of the dancer. Jinglebells are also tied to each stilt. One has to put in arduous training and practice to become a *Kokali-kattai* dancer since the dance demands acrobatic skill. In stilt dances prevalent in other regions of the country, the stick of the stilts

extends upward to be held by the dancer with his hands. In *Kokali-kattai* the stilts are tied to the feet of the dancers and not held at all, which makes it far more difficult. The only musical instrument that provides rhythmic inspiration to the dancers is a large frame drum called *Tappettai*.

There are a number of ceremonial dances prevalent in Kerala. Already dances like *Pookkavadi* and *Kolam Tullal* have been discussed in this chapter. The other three that deserves mention are : *Karadiyattam*, *Padayani* and *Poothamkali*.

Karadiyattam

In Palghat district, the *Urula* tribal community perform *Karadiyattam*. Men and women of all ages perform it. About ten to thirteen dancers are required to perform the dance. The main aim of the dance is to propitiate the gods, but it is believed that the performance of the dance makes the departed souls of the community more comfortable. The dancers move in a circular way and sing while dancing. The main refrain of the song is, "*Ele le le Karadi Ele le le*". The percussion music is provided by *Para* and *Thakil*, both drums. The melodic accompaniment is provided by *Kuzhal*, a wind instrument. The dancers wear their usual dress and dance around a bonfire which is the only light source for the dance.

Padayani

In *Padayani*, elements of theatre dominate and it has ritualistic overtones as it is danced before Devi temples, especially in the districts of Alleppey and Quilon. The performers wear highly stylized masks and towering headgears made out of arecanut fronds and painted with indigenous colours. The dancers wearing appropriate masks, headgears, and costumes represent gods, goddesses, demons, etc. The gods and goddesses mainly represented are : *Bhadrakali*, *Bhairavan*, and *Kalan* (the god of death). About a dozen dancers are needed for the performance. There is no age restriction for participating in the dance. *Thappu*, an indigenous musical instrument, provides the



Padayani (Kerala)

accompanying music. Because of the dominant theatrical elements *Padayani* may come under the category of dance-drama.

Poothamkali

At some places in the district of Malappuram *Poothamkali* is performed, especially by the dancers belonging to the Mannan community. The Mannans are basically washermen, but they do also practise indigenous medicine. Three dancers are required to present *Poothamkali*. They wear wooden masks made out of the wood of *Pala* and *Muruku* trees. These masks are also highly stylized and colourful. The dancers wear a tight fitting sash and tie jinglebells

(ghungroo) on their ankles. The dancer who represents *Pootham* has to undergo some austerities for seven days. It has also elements of theatre.

Kahadia

In the Dang region of Gujarat, where majority of people belong to tribal communities, the ceremonial dance named *Kahadia* is performed to express gratitude and reverence to God for having enabled them to perform the dance successfully. The dance is named after the musical instrument *Kahadi* which provides the melodic inspiration for the dance. It is a woodwind instrument with double beating reed and a conical bore, much like *Shehnai*. A longer reeded pipe but without fingerholes, called *Sur*, provides drone on the tonic, and is an inseparable companion to the *kahadi*. It is traditionally performed in six different movements and the last but one is the most spectacular, as the dancers, with the skill of acrobats, form a human pyramid while dancing. In the last movement the dancers offer their gratitude to God. Percussion music for the dance is provided by *Dholak*, a barrel-shaped drum, and *Khanjari*, a circular frame-drum.

Naati

Naati is danced in more than a dozen styles in Himachal Pradesh. Basically, *Naati* is a recreational kind of dance. But the *Naati* danced at the time of Dussehra festival in Kulu valley acquires a ceremonial character. The Dussehra festival in Kulu valley is a grand religious ceremony. Various deities worshipped in neighbouring villages are brought to the festival site with colourful processions. Performance of *Naati* on this occasion is a must. The dance movements are simple yet gracefully lyrical. It is danced in a semi-circular formation led by an expert dancer. The dance begins with a slow tempo which increases gradually. Earlier *Naati* was danced only by men and the most enthusiastic onlookers were women. Now both men and women perform the dance with equal zeal. The orchestra that accompanies the dance is comprised of *Sarna*, a double-reeded wind instrument that provides the melodic base; *Karnal*, a kind of long straight trumpet with a very large funnel;

Dhol and Nagada, the drums that give the rhythmic structure to the dance. The dancers sing while dancing.

Solakia

The *Solakia* dance is prevalent in Mizoram. 'So' literally means unnatural death, but in the context of this dance it means the severed head of an enemy. 'La' means dance and 'Kia' refers to that which has been done with better understanding and knowledge. Originally, *Solakia* was danced to celebrate the victory over enemies, especially when the head of an enemy is brought home as a trophy by the victor. Now, it is performed on all important occasions. Although at present it is performed by men and women of all Mizo communities, it is believed to have originated by the *Pimi* and *Lakher* communities. The vocal music that accompanies the dance is closer to chanting than singing. Percussion music is provided by a pair of gongs, one bigger than the other, are called *Darkhuang*. Several pairs of cymbals are also played to enhance the music.

Dandia Gair

Dandia Gair dance is performed with pomp and show during the Holika festival in Rajasthan. The dancers wear wide bottomed and pleated gowns over the *Churidar-pyjama*. The costumes are very colourful and are embroidered with golden threads. The dance is performed in circular movement. Only percussion music accompany the dance provided by two kinds of drums called *Dhol* and *Nagara*; three kinds of idiophones called *Thali*, *Manjira* and *Khartal*. The dancers also wear anklebells. When they dance the tinkling of the anklebells enhances the richness of the percussion music. As the tempo of the dance becomes faster, the flowing gowns present a feast of visual spectacle.

Thisham

In the hills of Manipur lives the *Tangkhul* tribal community. In the month

of December they perform the *Thisham* dance. The dancers form a bow-like arrangement and depict the cycle of life and death. The song accompanying the dance speaks of the meeting of souls after death and exhort people not to be afraid of death.

Shad Ronkhla

At Nongtalang village in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya live twelve tribal communities. They all perform *Shad Ronkhla* or Tiger dance. Whenever a tiger is killed by the hunters of these tribes, the representatives of the tribes go to the priest who fixes a date for the performance of the dance to celebrate the killing of the tiger. All the twelve communities participate in the dance. First the boys dance it during the day and later the girls dance at night. The dancers wear their ceremonial costumes and the music is provided by simple instruments, such as, flute, a huge war drum, a smaller drum and a clapper made of bamboo.

There are scores of ceremonial dances prevalent in different parts of this country. The representative kinds of ceremonial dances have been discussed in this chapter.

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HARVEST DANCES

More than 80% of Indians have been engaged in cultivation for centuries. Since the Hindu *dharma* is not a religion but a way of life, various agricultural operations are associated with rituals and festivals (*utsava*). Dancing is a part of the ritual or of the *utsava*. Right from the time of preparing the field for sowing seeds to the end of harvesting, during each stage of agricultural operations, various kinds of dances are performed. Representative dances will be discussed in this chapter.

Although industrial civilization is increasingly influencing the life style of the people living in urban areas, Indian civilization is basically agricultural. People living in rural areas are still retaining it. Indian civilization holds food with a very high esteem because it is not something that merely fills the stomach. Eating is considered as an act of *yajna*. There is a custom of reciting a prayer before eating. In Orissa the prayer has a line that says, "*Udara-bharana nuhen ate ye yajna karma*", which means this is not filling the stomach but a performance of *yajna*. To fully appreciate Indian civilization it is a must to understand what is *Yajna*. It is just not pouring clarified butter (*ghee*) on burning fire. There is a deep symbolism behind it. The ritual is associated with a powerful myth that explains the concept of performing *yajna*.

A Vedic work named *Shatapatha Brahmana* narrates the myth as follows:

Prajapati, the originator of this universe, disintegrated his body into countless parts and scattered them in space. They formed the universe that is like a jigsaw puzzle. The main aim of *yajna* is to

mentally reconstruct the scattered body of the *Prajapati* so that the performer of the *yajna* rightly comprehends the relationship among the myriad different parts of the universe and the basic unity in the mind-boggling diversity.

The ritual of pouring ghee on burning fire is a highly symbolic activity. The Vedas regard *Agni*, the fire god, as the leader of all gods (*devata*). There is also a symbolic reason behind this concept. Fire is the only thing in this world that goes upward acting against the gravitation. Some gaseous things may go up but they all leave the plane of their origin. Fire, on the other hand, although goes upward, never leaves the plane where it is ignited. The definition of *agni* is : *angati urdham ya*, meaning that which goes upward. Besides, it is luminous, for which it is *devata* par excellence. In the *yajna* ritual the fire symbolizes the brighter aspects of human beings that aspire to go upward, but not leaving the earthly level of existence, aiming at an experience much higher than life. *Ghee* symbolizes the clarified awareness. In Indian mythology, milk is the symbol of consciousness. According to mythology, *Visnu*, the divinity who sustains the world, reclines on the *kshira-sagara* (ocean of milk). It means that the divinity exists in the vast realm of our consciousness beyond the experience of the senses. The *sagara manthana* (churning of the ocean of milk) episode describes how the churning produced both beautiful and beneficial things like *amrita*, the elixir of immortality, and also the *halahala*, meaning deadly poison. It happens also today. For example; churning of the human consciousness and knowledge has produced many a life saving medicine as also the killer nuclear weapons, which can be compared respectively to *amrita* and *halahala*.

Churning of milk first produces butter which is the symbol of love in Indian mythology. That is why Krishna, being the incarnation of total love, has such an abiding fascination for butter. When the butter is heated over fire it is clarified to produce *ghee*. In Sanskrit *tapas* literally means heat. From this word is derived *tapasya* that means extremely rigorous meditation for clarify-

ing the consciousness. Thus the ritual of pouring *ghee* on burning fire symbolizes the offering of clarified human consciousness to the aspiration of going to a much higher state of awareness for reconstructing mentally the unified body of the infinitely diversified universe. Now, of course, *yajna* has lost its deeper symbolism and is performed merely as a religious ritual, because the Indian civilization has been very much eroded under the influence of alien cultures.

Because eating is regarded as a performance of *yajna*, the food grains are also held in high esteem. In many a kind of *pooja* (worship) uncooked rice grains are used as ritual material. An *Upanishad* says, "*anna hi brahma*" which means the rice is *Brahman*, the ultimate divinity. Food grains are regarded as the symbols of *Lakshmi*, the goddess of beauty and prosperity. In many parts of India food grains are worshiped after the harvesting is over.

It is but natural for an agricultural civilization to hold harvesting and other farming operations in high esteem and to consider them as occasions for celebration in the form of *utsavas*. As said earlier, dancing forms an integral part of an *utsava*.

Bihu

One of the most representative harvest dances is *Bihu* of Assam which is mainly a rice growing area. On three most important stages of agricultural operations *Bihu* festival (*utsava*) is held just before the sowing of the seeds, at the time of transplanting the paddy seedlings and while harvesting. The word *Bihu* is a derivative of the Sanskrit word *Visuva* that means equinox. The Assamese pronounce 'S' as 'H'. Therefore, they pronounce *Visuva* as *Bihuba*. In Assam, Bengal, and Orissa, 'V' is pronounced as 'B'. The shorter form of *Bihuba* is *Bihu*.

Of the three *Bihu* festivals, the most colourful and lively is the *Bahag Bihu* which is held from the first day of the lunar month of *Vaishakh*, the Assamese derivative of which is *Bahag*. This is the day of the vernal equinox and the



Bihu (Assam)

Indian New Year's Day. In fact, the festival begins from the New Year Eve and continues from four days to one month. The *Bahag Bihu* is celebrated in four stages of development. The first is known as *Goru* (cattle) *Bihu*. It may last for one or more days. In *Goru Bihu* the cattle, especially the cows, are specially treated with oil-bath and food like salted rice cakes. In the evening there is music and dance. The next is *Manuh* (human beings) *Bihu* in which after a ceremonial bath people wear new clothes. Boys and girls perform *Bihu* dance to the accompaniment of *Bihu* songs which are basically love songs. The songs are quite tuneful. The musical accompaniment is provided by *Dhol*, the drum, *Pepa*, a buffalo-horn pipe, *Toka*, the bamboo clapper and cymbals. The next is *Gosain Bihu* in which people gather in the shrine called *Namghar*. There, all pray to God first and then the musicians and dancers perform. The *Bihu* festival is concluded with *Bihu Urva* which means sending away the *Bihu*. This is done at a lonely paddy field or forest where the villagers go with all the ritual

materials used during the three phases. A ritual is performed to bid farewell to *Bihu*.

The *Kankali Bihu* is held in the lunar month of *Kartik* corresponding to September/October. This month in colloquial Assamese is called *Kati*. Therefore, the festival is also called *Kati Bihu*. At this time of the year paddy seedlings are trans-planted. The festival is held for proper growth of the transplanted seedlings. It is observed with solemnity. Rituals are performed and prayers are sung. Usually dance is not performed during this *Bihu*.

The *Bhogali Bihu*, also called *Magh Bihu* since it is held in the lunar month of *Magha*, corresponding to December/January, is again a festival of gaiety and jubilation. By the time the festival is held, the harvesting is almost over or at the last phase. Houses are full of harvested grains. This is the time for the villagers to celebrate. Therefore, the dances performed during the *Bhogali Bihu* are more vigorous and faster in tempo than the dances performed during the *Bahag Bihu*.

Sarhul

Several Harvest dances are prevalent among the tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh. The Oraons perform *Sarhul* dance after the Kharif crops are harvested. Through the dance the gods are thanked for the crops and they are prayed to grant the community a happy life. On the full moon day of the lunar month of Chaitra, corresponding to March/April, this dance is performed after worshipping a *Sal* tree. This is the time when *Sal* trees blossom. There is a tribal myth associated with the worship of a *Sal* tree. The myth is as follows :

Oppressed by a king of Bihar, the Oraon tribe fled to a *Sal* forest in Madhya Pradesh. The *Sal* trees not only gave them shelter but also necessary means for their living. *Sal* trees for the Oraons are symbols of protection. In gratitude, therefore, they worship a tall *Sal* tree every year and perform the *Sarhul* dance around it.

The entire village go near the selected *Sal* tree every year on the full moon day of Chaitra and in a ritual give it their offerings. Then men and women dance around the tree throughout the night. Often dancers from other villages are also invited to join the festivities. While dancing the dancers sing and musical accompaniment is provided by *Mandar*, a cylindrical drum with two faces, *Nagara*, a large hemispherical drum with one face, *Jhanj*, the cymbals, and *Chatkola*, a kind of castenets. The dancers are all in white. Men wear peacock feathers on their back side waist and women decorate their buns with white feathers or cranes and white flowers. The dance is usually in a fast tempo.

Parab

The Raja Murias living in the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh perform the *Parab* dance after the harvesting of Kharif crops. It is also performed during the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra. A branch of the *Semal* tree is brought and planted at the central place of the village. Only unmarried boys and girls perform this dance round the *Semal* branch celebrating the harvest festival. Groups of dancers exchange visits and the dancing goes on throughout the night. The dancers wear clothes of bright colours and decorate themselves with laces and strands of cowrie. While the percussion music is provided by a double faced drum, the melodic, by *Mahuri*, a reeded wind instrument like *Shehnai*.

Saila-Reena

The *Saila-Reena* dance is performed by the Gonds of Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh. The Gond is the second largest tribal community of the country numbering around six millions. They are found in Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, besides Madhya Pradesh where they have their largest population. They are an agricultural community. The Gond of Mandla are artistic people. The women wear distinctive ornaments and tattoo marks. After a successful harvest men and women express their joy and happiness in a dance festival that takes them

from village to village. The young men dance *Saila* a number which is danced with a baton in one hand and a spray of peacock feathers in the other. The *Reena* is the dance that the girls perform. When they join the group of youngmen the dance gathers momentum and the rhythm rises to a very fast crescendo.

Bhojali

The Gonds of Satpura and Chhatisgarh regions perform *Bhojali* dance. It is performed during the festival held to express gratitude to *Bhojali Mata*, who is identified with goddess *Annapoorna*. There is a tribal myth associated with the dance. It is as follows :

Once there was a severe drought. People prayed gods very fervently. Pleased with the sincerity of the praying folk, goddess *Annapoorna* appeared in the dream of the priest and told him to worship the *Bhojali Mata* who is none else than herself. When the goddess was worshipped with great devotion, rain came pouring down. The dried up fields again became green with crops. The people were delirious with joy and danced so long that their feet were blistered, yet they went on dancing on their stilts. The stilt is called *genda*. Therefore, the dance is also called *Genda* dance. From then onwards the dance is performed every year during the same period.

The stilt dancers begin their dance and practice from the full moon day of the lunar month of *Asadh*, corresponding to June/July. The conclusion of the festival and the last performance of the stilt dance is held on the full moon night of the lunar month of *Shravan*, corresponding to July/August. On that day *visarjan* ritual for the *Bhojali Mata* is also performed.

Hazagiri

The Riangs of Tripura perform *Hazagiri* dance in the lunar month of *Bhadra* (August/September). Actually, *Hazagiri* is a form of *Lakshmi*, the goddess of prosperity. The Riangs practise *Jhum* (shift) cultivation. When the



Hazagiri (Tripura)

crop is ready for harvesting *Hazagiri* dance is performed invoking goddess Hazagiri for a bumper crop. The rituals begin with the worship of nine gods and culminate in worshipping goddess *Hazagiri*. It is performed by the girls of Rieng community. They wear a lungi - like striped skirt and blouse, usually made of black cloth. As a part of the dance they perform on an earthen pitcher. The symbolism of pitcher has been discussed earlier. In most of the dances with pitcher, it is balanced on the head as in *Karagam* of Tamil Nadu. In *Hazagiri* the dancer balances herself while dancing on it. The pitcher symbolizes the human body. When a dancer dances on it the symbolism is that the dance, which is performed for invoking goddess Hazagiri, is beyond the physical existence of the dancer. It requires a lot of practice to remain in balance while dancing on the pitcher. The musical instruments used with this dance are *Khamb*, the drum, and bamboo flute.

Dandia Rasa

The *Dandia Rasa* dance of Gujarat is performed as an essential part of festivals synchronized with different agricultural operations like sowing and harvesting. *Dandia Rasa* is danced only by men. Its counterpart is *Garba* which is danced only by women. It has been discussed in the previous chapter. It is believed that *Dandia Rasa* was originated by Krishna. Several kinds of *Rasa* dances are prevalent in Gujarat and Sourashtra regions. All are associated with Krishna legend. These *Rasa* dances are totally different from the *Rasa* dances of Manipur, which are highly stylized and are considered classical. *Dandia* is an epithet because in this *Rasa* dance the dancers hold two wooden sticks in both their hands. While dancing they rhythmically strike not only the two sticks but also strike the sticks held by other dancers who are either in front or at the sides. Often jinglebells (*ghungroo*) are tied to one end of each stick. When the sticks are struck the jingling sound enhances the percussion music. The dancers wear typical costume which consists of a white frock coat called *Kadiya*. It is colourfully embroidered with local motifs of sun, moon, peacock, etc. The *chorni* is like *churidar-pyjama*. It is also white. The dancers cover their heads with turbans. The dancers sing while dancing and the percussion music is provided by drums and cymbals.

Lebang Bomani

Another interesting harvest dance of Tripura is *Lebang Bomani*. The dance is named after the distinctive bamboo clapper with a drone. While playing the clapper the drone wire is also plucked rhythmically. The sound of the drone attracts a kind of grasshoppers. They come in large numbers hearing the droning sound. The dancers gather the grasshoppers and put them in a bamboo bag which is a part of the costume the dancers wear. The dancers are all girls. The grasshoppers are eaten with relish and it is believed that if the catch is sizable then a bumper crop will be harvested. The grasshoppers coming in large numbers attract birds. To drive them away a bamboo made idiophone

called *Tak-dutren* is sounded rhythmically. Besides the idiophone and clapper, the percussion music is provided by a drum called *Pung*. The melodic content of the accompanying music is provided by a simple string instrument called *Sarinala*. At times, men also join the dance. The choreographic pattern changes from time to time. When both men and women are dancing, women invariably dance in the inner circular formation and the men in the outer ring.

Bhangra

Punjab is considered as the granary of India. The main crops are wheat and sugarcane. Three harvest dances are performed in Punjab and all of them are associated with wheat cultivation. The most popular and widely known dance is *Bhangra*. Next to it is *Jhumar*. The *Karhi* dance is performed more in the hill region.

Bhangra is one of the most virile dances and is danced only by men. After the wheat seeds are sown the *Bhangra* is performed in the full moon night. First of all, in an open place in the village the leading drummer plays *Dhol*, the drum with two faces. One face is played by the fingers, the other face is played with a blunt stick. The rhythmic phrases played on the *Dhol* is indeed exhilarating. Hearing the drum beats dancers come and gather in the open place. A *Bhangra* dancer wears *lungi*, a Kurta, a waistcoat, and a turban. The dancers wear colourful dress. The *Dhol* (also called *Dholak*) player is the leader. He is joined by a pair or more of vocalists who sing couplets of folk song called *Boli* or *Dhola*. After a couplet or two the stepping changes and the dancers shout with great zest the typical refrains like *Bale-Bale*, *Oai-Oai*, and *Uhun-Uhun*. Various kinds of steppings are there in the repertory of *Bhangra*. Acrobatic elements also spice up the dance. The main inspiration for *Bhangra* comes from the enlivening drum music. Earlier no other musical instrument was played with the dance. Nowadays idiophones like cymbals and *Chimta* are being used. The melodic content is only singing. No melodic musical instrument is played with *Bhangra* dance.



Bhangra (Punjab)

Jhumar

In *Jhumar* many elements of *Bhangra* are there. The only difference is that while dancing the dancers depict the various agricultural operations through dance movements. The dancers also execute gaits of different domesticated animals. The finale of *Jhumar* is exactly like *Bhangra*. It is also danced by men only and accompanying music is only provided by *Dholak* and singing of folk songs.

Karthi

Karthi is performed by both men and women. Unlike *Bhangra* and *Jhumar*, in this dance there is a ritual beginning in which a god of harvest is worshipped first. Then women singing songs lead the procession to the place of the dance. Men follow them. *Karthi* is not as vigorous as *Bhangra* and *Jhumar*. In this dance a reeded wind instrument like *Shehnai* is used. The dancers perform in circular formation with men and women alternating and holding hands of the nearest dancers on either sides.

Lam-Kut-Lam

Lam-Kut-Lam is the harvest dance of the *Kom* tribe of Manipur. There are about ten thousand *Koms* belonging to the *Kuki-Chin* constellation of tribes. In the month of July/August, when the paddy transplantation is over, the *Koms* hold a grand festival. That is the time for the *Reivang* flowers to blossom. Young boys and girls wearing these flowers on their headgears dance joyously in the festival while singing specific songs. The well-to-do farmers of the *Kom* tribe present the dancers pigs, cows, and buffaloes as gifts. These are killed on the concluding day of the celebration and a grand feast is arranged. It is believed that the dance brings prosperity to the village. One of the songs that accompany the dance invokes a god named *Khornu*. In the dance the *Reivang* flowers symbolize richness and prosperity.

Kud

Kud is a typical community dance performed in the middle mountain ranges of Jammu. During the rainy season, when the maize is harvested, the villagers come down from the nearby hills and gather in the vicinity of the *gramdevata*, the presiding deity of the village. To express their gratitude for protecting their crops, cattle, and children from natural calamities, the farmers dance *Kud* for the deity. Men, women and children wearing their best dress gather around a bonfire for the nightlong festivities. The musical accompaniment is provided by *Dhauns*, the drum, *Bansari*, the bamboo flute, *Ransingha*, a kind of trumpet. The costume of the dancers vary from place to place as do the song sung while dancing. The *Kud* is usually danced all night on moonlight nights.

Various kinds of *Nati* dances are performed in Himachal Pradesh. One kind of *Nati* has been discussed under ceremonial dances. The one danced in the *Birshi* festival is called *Birshi Nati*. The festival is held in the Rampur region just before harvesting. The dancers put on their typical costumes and dance with a lyrical grace and elegance. While *Shenai*, a double-reeded wind instrument provides the melodic base for the dance, rhythm is provided by three percussion instruments, namely, *Dhol*, the drum, *Nagari*, a small hemispherical single face drum played with two lean sticks, and *Ghasal*, made of bronze. Two kinds of lip-voiced trumpets, namely, *Narasingha* and *Kahadi* punctuate the music with their typical sounds and create a kind of ceremonial atmosphere.

Dhan Nach

Dhan Nach, which literally means Paddy Dance, is the harvest dance of Sikkim where paddy is the main crop. The dance is performed by both men and women at the time of every important agricultural operation, especially while the paddy is being harvested. The dancers wear traditional costumes. Men wear typical pajama and shirt locally called *Daura-suruwal*, a waist coat,

and *Patuka* (sash), *Topi* (cap), and *Rumal* (Kerchief). Women wear *Fariya* (a type of sari), *Coubandi-cholo* (typical blouse), and *Hembari* (scarf tied on the chest). They also wear various kinds of traditional ornaments. The musical accompaniment is provided by *Madal*, a drum with two faces, and *Murali*, the bamboo flute. The dancers also tie jinglebells, locally called *gungur*, on their ankles.

Ponung

Ponung is the harvest dance performed by the Adi tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh. It is danced at the festival held just before the harvesting operations. It is believed that the dance will bring about a good harvest and prosperity to the community. Married girls and women take part in the dance which is led by a man called *Miri*. He is adept in singing the particular songs that tell of local myth of the origin of paddy and other crops. While singing the *Miri* rhythmically rattles the iron disc fitted loosely to the hilt of his sword. The dancers in chorus repeat the lines sung by the *Miri*. No other musical instrument is used in this dance.



Ponung (Arunachal Pradesh)

Domruea

The **Ho** tribal community living in Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal holds a series of festivals connected with different agricultural operations from sowing to harvesting. Dancing is a must for every festival. **Ho** is the shorter form of **Horo** that literally means a human being. The dance that the **Hos** perform at the time of sowing paddy seeds is called *Domruea*. The festival is held in April/May. First the spirits of the ancestors are worshipped and a cock is sacrificed. The fields where the seeds will be sown is given turmeric. The gods of the field are called Nage-era and Bindi-era. When the rituals are over, both men and women perform the *Domruea* dance.

Hero Parab

The next festival is called *Hero Parab*. It is held on the full moon night of the lunar month of Ashadh (June/July). Around this time the paddy fields are re-ploughed to get rid of the weeds. Ritual offerings are made to the divinities, namely, Desauli and Jaera. This festival is celebrated in the memory of **Lita**, the legendary hero. The legend of the Hos is :

Lita is the youngest son of **Surmi** who was killed by the mythical wild animal called **Bandu**. **Lita** prayed the deity named *Jaera*. Pleased with the sincere prayer the deity gave blessings to **Lita** so that he can recover the dead body of his father from the claws of the ferocious animal. **Lita** showing exceptional bravery and determination recovered the body of his father from the wild animal. Therefore, **Lita** is regarded as an ideal son.

Batauli Nach

The festival that is held next is called *Batauli Parab*. It is celebrated in the month of August/September and is associated with the proper growth and vitality of the standing crop. This festival is also dedicated to the memory of the legendary hero **Lita**. The dance is named after the festival, i.e., *Batauli Nach*.

Nom-jama

When the paddy grains ripen the *Nom-jama* festival is held. The ripe grains of paddy is taken and after parboiling are beaten flat. In **Ho** dialect it is called Taben, in Hindi it is called Chewda, which is given as offering to Sing-Bonga, the supreme deity of the **Hos** and also to the spirits of the ancestors on the leaves of SoSo (black nut) and Kusha grass. New rice is also cooked on this day. None take new rice before this day. The dance performed is named after the festival.

Mage Parab

Finally comes the *Mage Parab*, the most important festival of the Hos. It is held between December and February when the crops from every field have been harvested. *Mage* means mother and the festival is celebrated in the memory of the first mother of the human beings. In the evening of the festival day the *Mage* dance is performed by both men and women like all the dances discussed above. The musical instruments that accompany the dances are *Dumarg* (which is more commonly known as *Maandar*), a cylindrical drum with two faces, *Dram*, a hemispherical drum with one face like *nagada*, and bamboo flute.

Tarpa

Warli, an ancient tribe of Western India, lives in the Vindhya and Satpura hill ranges. In Maharashtra, they are concentrated in western districts of Nasik and Thana with a population of about four lakhs. They play an interesting musical instrument called Tarpa. It is made with the thick skin of a whole gourd into which a bamboo pipe with finger holes is inserted to form a wind instrument. It is decorated with colourful threads and the fronds appear like the feather of a peacock. The harvest dance that is centered around this musical instrument is called Tarpa dance. It is performed in the month of September/October with the belief that the dance will impart necessary

vitality to the growing crops for a rich harvest. Men and women both wearing colourful costumes and decorated with leaves and flowers dance usually in circular formation with the *Tarpa* player at the centre. *Tarpa* is generally played by an old man who has gained expertise in the art of playing it. Through his control of the instrument, he provides variations in the tempo of the dance.

Hazong

The *Hazongs*, a small tribal community which live in the Garo hills of Meghalaya celebrate a festival every year just before the harvest. It is believed that proper observance of this festival not only invokes God's blessings for a good and plentiful harvest, but also ensures the well-being of the community through-out the year. The *Hazong* dance is the most important aspect of the festival. Both men and women participate in the dance.

Bijja Pandu

In Koraput district of Orissa live the Koyas, a tribal community. Most of their dances reflect the perils of jungle life and hunting. In the lunar month of Chaitra (March/April) the Koyas observe a festival called *Bijja Pandu* to worship their deity who bestows good and plentiful harvest. During the festival the men folk go hunting while the women perform the dance named after the festival. On other occasions both men and women participate in the dance which starts with slow steps and the rhythm builds up gradually with the tempo of the drum music. The women provide the beat with sticks fitted with jinglebells, while the men wearing turbans decorated with bison horns play the drums.

Since people living in rural India are mostly dependent on agriculture, harvest dances are performed with great zeal and enthusiasm.



SOCIAL DANCES

Extrême happiness calls for a celebration. Dance and celebration go hand in hand. Human beings are essentially social. There are some events in the social life that fill one with great happiness which enkindle the desire for celebration. Such occasions are marriage and birth of a child. It is not only the family but also the entire community living together in a village feel very happy. These are the events that ensure continuity of the community and of the tradition nurtured by it. Therefore, marriage and childbirth are celebrated by all the societies. These two celebrations, more often than not, definitely include dancing. Some do it in an informal manner, but there are communities, both tribal and non-tribal, who do the dancing in a formal manner. Some of the formal childbirth and marriage dances will be discussed in this chapter.

There is yet another kind of social dance in which unmarried boys and girls choose their partners. This kind of dances will also be discussed.

Laddakhi Marriage Dance

Unlike other places, Laddakh has a traditional marriage custom in which the bride comes to the groom's house for the marriage. Dance, accompanied by specific songs, is performed when the bride is being brought to the groom's house. The dancers are called *Neyopa*. They wear distinctive traditional dresses with equally distinctive and fascinating jewellery. The leader of the group called *Neokhpun* has to be an expert vocalist with a wide-ranging repertoire of folk songs, especially those sung during the different stages of the marriage



Laddakhi Marraige Dance (Jammu & Kashmir)

ceremony. The accompanying musicians usually belong to the *Mon* community. The musical instruments are : *Surnai*, a double-reeded wind instrument similar to *Shehnai*, and *Damama* a pair of bowl shaped drum much like the *Nagada* of North India. In olden days the *Damamas* were carried on the back of a yak.

Gaja Nach

Gaja Nach, which literally means the dance of elephant, is performed by the sepherd community called *Dhangar* who live in Maharashtra. Since it is considered auspicious, the dance is also performed at the time of temple festivals. The dance is performed with a slow tempo and swaying movements that evoke the gait of an elephant in a stylized way. The dancers also hold colourful scarves which when moved in a swaying manner suggest the fanning of elephant's ears. The *Pavato* provides the melodic music and percussion music is provided by the *Khaital* and *Dhol*.

Devar-attam

The *Devar-attam* is prevalent in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. It is professionally conducted by a group of performing artist belonging to *Kampalattu Nayakkar* community. It is danced by men only wearing white costume. The headgear is also white from which dangles a coloured bead. Seven or nine or eleven dancers are required to perform this dance on the occasion of a marriage ceremony. Specific songs are sung to the accompaniment of the drum music provided by *Urumi*. At times a long flute is also played.

Kolkali

The marriage dance of Lakshadweep is called *Kolkali*. It is performed by men only. About twelve to sixteen dancers perform the dance. They beat



Devar-attam (Tamil Nadu)



Kolkali (Lakshadweep)

two sticks that provide the percussion music. The leader plays a pair of cymbals. The dress of the dancers is very simple consisting of a lungi, a banian, and a scarf over the head. The dance begins with a slow tempo that gradually increases and become quite vigorous at the finale.

Jhoria

The *Bhil* tribal community of Rajasthan performs *Jhoria* dance at the time of marriage ceremony. Both men and women perform the dance. The male dancers form one circle and the female dancers form another and dance to the music provided by *Dhol*, the drum, *Shehnai*, the reeded wind instrument, and *Nagara*, a large bowl- shaped drum with one face.

Kachchi Ghori

In the eastern part of Rajasthan *Kachchi Ghori* dance is mostly performed

at the time of marriage ceremony. The dance is generally performed by dancers belonging to *Kumhar* and *Bavaria* communities. As the name of the dance suggests, it is a dance of false horse rider. To the both ends of a pair of bamboo rods two baskets are tied. The head of a horse prepared with papier-mache is fixed to one of the baskets. To the other a bunch of flex fibres are tied to suggest the tail of the horse. The dancer gets into the dummy horse at the middle of the space between the two bamboo rods and adjusts it at his waist so that it appears as if he was riding a horse. The dancer is dressed like a bridegroom. Traditionally, four to five dancers perform the dance. The musical accompaniment to the dance is provided by *Dhol*, the drum, and *Turahi*, a wind instrument made of brass.

Almost all the tribal communities perform dance at the time of marriage of anyone belonging to their community. They are, however, the usual recreational dances, not specifically for the marriage ceremony.

Quite a few communities perform dances on the occasion of childbirth. The *Mali* community of Rajsthan perform *Chari* dance when a son is born to a family of their community. It is also called *Charwa*. A pitcher made of brass is called *Chari*. The dance is named after it because the women of the community each balancing the pitcher on head perform the dance. On the mouth of the pitcher is kept a bowl with flames. The flames are up to one foot or one and half foot high. While dancing the dancers spin and sway, even, at times, they sit down and get up with the rhythm, but they do not lose the balance of the pitcher on their heads. This acrobatic element makes the dance fascinating. The dancers are dressed in their best. Only percussion music accompany the dance. The musical instruments are : *Dhol*, the drum, and two idiophones, namely, *Thali* and *Bankia*.

The *Dafla* community of Arunachal Pradesh perform specific dances on the occasion of both marriage and childbirth. It is danced by women only. Wearing otheir colourful skirts, blouse, and necklaces of colourful beads, the dancers clasp each other's waist and dance with graceful swaying movements.

No musical instrument accompany with the dance. The dancers wear waist girdles which produce rhythmic percussion sound that enhances the appeal of the songs the dancers sing.

The *Dhobi* community of Uttar Pradesh also celebrate marriage and childbirth with dancing. Generally dancers are all men, but, at times, women also join the dance. The dancers are mostly in circular formations. *Dholak*, the drum, and a folk version of *Shehnai*, the reeded wind instrument are musical instruments used.

In the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh the *Dhobi* community perform *Kanara* dance at the time of a marriage ceremony. It is also known as *Kanadyayi*. Until a few decades ago no marriage could be solemnized in the *Dhobi* community without performing the dance. Before the dancing begins, goddess Saraswati, Lord Ganesh, and the Guru are invoked. Then the dancers begin their dance and go to a pond or well to bring water, all the while dancing. The musical instruments used are : a folk version of *Sarangi*, a Chordophone, *Dholak*, the drum, *Lota* and *Tar*, the idiophones.

Nyida Parik

The Adis are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Their marriage ceremony is called Nyida Parik which has its own characteristics and style. There is also a legend associated with the Adi marriage. It is as follows:

Donyi is the sun god. His daughter is *Donyi Mumdi*. She was married to Abo-Tani, the father of all human beings. Their marriage ceremony was a grand affair. Marriage of anyone of the Adi community should follow the same ceremonial rituals.

After completion of preliminary arrangements of marriage agreed upon by both the parties, the bride party along with the bride is invited to visit the house of the groom. A grand reception awaits the bride party at some distance from the house of the groom. In the reception is included the dance of two groups of male dancers. The dancers of one party wear hats made of

cane and decorated with beaks of hornbill. They hold poles called *Yoksa*. The dancers of the other party wear hats made of cane but without any decoration. They hold brass plates. When the bride's party comes nearer the dancers start dancing and hitting the poles on the ground and beating the brass plates rhythmically. The dance is usually in faster tempo. The hornbill signifies the nobility of the groom's family and the brass plates implies that they speak in a pleasant voice. In other words the dance in the reception express symbolically that the groom deserves the bride.

Chari

Women of the *Mali* community of Kishangarh region of Rajasthan perform *Chari* dance on the occasion of the birth of a son. It is also called *Charwa*. *Chari* literally means a brass pitcher. The dance is called *Chari*, because each of the dancers balances a brass pitcher on her head. On the mouth of the pitcher is put a bowl of fire; flames going up more than one foot high. The dancers spin and make swaying movements yet they never lose the balance of the pitcher. The dancers wear their best dress and dance to the music of *Dhol*, the drum, *Shehnai*, the reeded wind instrument, and two idiophones, namely, *Thali* and *Bankia*.

Dafla

The women of *Dafla* tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh dance on the occasion of a childbirth in the community. They dance in semicircular formation, each dancer holding the waist of the two dancers flanking her. They sing while dancing. No musical instrument is used. The waist girdles and iron chains produce a tinkling sound that becomes the percussion music of the dance.

Dhobi

The *Dhobi* community of Uttar Pradesh sing and dance on every social occasions including childbirth. Men and women both participate in the

dancing. They usually dance in circular formations. The accompanying music is provided by *Dholak*, the drum with two faces, and a folk version of *Shehnai*, the reeded wind instrument.

Kaksar

The *Abuj-Maria* tribal community perform an interesting dance known as *Kaksar*. Actually, *Kaksar* is a deity who is worshipped before the rains for a rich harvest. It is, however, different from the other harvest dances discussed earlier, because, according to the tradition, while the boys and girls are dancing they choose their partners for life. The marriage is solemnized later. The boys wear a fascinating costume that includes a belt of large number of big and small jinglebells (*ghungroo*) tied to the back side of their waist. When they dance the sound of the jinglebells enhances the appeal of the percussion



Kaksar (Madhya Pradesh)

music of the dance. The girls hold in their right hand waist-high iron rods having a few jinglebells on the top. While dancing they sing and strike the iron rod vertically on the ground on the accented beats of the rhythm. This sound blends well with that of the jinglebells worn by the boys. The girls form a semicircle and each dancer holds the iron rod in her right hand and the waist of nearest dancer with the left hand. The boys form a semicircle in front of the girl group. Both move in circles. While *Mandar* and *Timki* provide the percussion music, *Bansuri*, the flute provides the melodic component of the accompanying music.

Hudo

Hudo is another dance performed at the *Tarnetar* fair where girls choose their husbands. *Tarnetar* is a small village in the Sourashtra region of Gujrat. *Tarnetar* is a colloquial derivative of Trinetreshwar (god with three eyes), an aspect of Lord Shiva, who is enshrined in the temple at the village. Every year on *Rishi Panchami* that falls on the fifth lunar day (*tithi*) of the dark fortnight of the lunar month of Ashwina, corresponding to August/ September, the three day *Tarnetar* fair begins. A legend is associated with the fair which is as follows :

Arjuna, the hero of Mahabharata, was the winner in the archery competition held at this place. It was declared that the archer who can pierce the eye of a fish hanging from a very tall pole without looking at the fish but looking at its reflection in the pool of water around the pole, will be chosen by Draupadi as her husband. Only Arjuna could perform this near impossible feat of archery for which Draupadi chose him as her husband. This event is commemorated every year by holding the fair where girls choose their respective husbands.

The young men who wish to be chosen by the girls, come with colourful and beautifully embroidered umbrellas. They also wear an equally colourful

embroidered jacket. After choosing the husbands the boys and girls perform *Hudo*. The girls form a line and the boys form their line. The two lines of dancers face each other and dance to the music provided by drums, flutes, and other folk musical instruments. The tempo is usually faster and while dancing the girls clap on the palms of the boys with both their palms. The marriage is formalised later.

Bhagoria

Bhagoria is another festival where young boys and girls choose their partners for life. The *Bhils* living in Jhabua, Alirajpur and Dhar range of Madhya Pradesh, have four main ethnic groups : Bhil, Bhilala, Patalia and Ranth. *Bhagoria* dance is performed by all these groups. Before Holi in the lunar month of Phalgun, corresponding to February/March, *Bhagoria* fair and *Haats* (occasional market) are organised. Most probably it originated as a



Bhagoria (Madhya Pradesh)

fertility ritual and later festivity became more important than the ritual. On the day the fair begins, the dancers gather round a pole fixed vertically on the ground. The headman of the village worships *Mandar*, a drum with two faces. He then strikes the drum. Immediately the drummers start playing. Both men and women participate in the dance. The male dancers hold bows. The dance is accompanied with the percussion music of one or more *Mandars* only.

The *Chhapeli* dance prevalent in the Kumaon region of Uttar Pradesh is a social dance which is playful as well as amorous. Several duet dances are performed by couples who may be husband and wife or lovers. Each of the female dancers holds a mirror and a handkerchief. The musicians stand in a semicircle and the pairs of dancers dance before them. The vocalists sing in a chorus and the dancers dance to their singing. The percussion instruments that accompany the singing are : *Hurka*, an hourglass shaped drum, and *Manjira*, the cymbals.

Tushimig

The society of *Kinnauri* tribe of Himachal Pradesh is both polyandrous and polygamous. Although the main occupation of the community is rearing of sheep and goats for the purpose of gathering wool and selling them, quite a few are also agriculturists. One of the festivals that the *Kinnauris* organise is *Tushimig*. Mainly the unmarried girls become more enthusiastic during the month long festival. On the day the festival begins, the unmarried girls choose a spacious house which is meticulously cleaned and decorated. They then prepare a sumptuous meal. After that they go and invite the boys. Most of these young men are boyfriends of the girls. All the boys and girls feast together. After the meal they dance with gay abandon. The musical accompaniment is provided by *Dhol*, the drum, *Bugial*, a kind of wind instrument, and *Damentu*, the horn.

Around the middle of the twentieth century the West felt the necessity of imparting sex education to the youth and adolescent. But almost all the tribal

communities have been giving sex education in their own way for thousands of years. They have a system of having separate dormitories for unmarried girls and boys. Generally, these dormitories are located at the end of a village. In the evening, all the girls who have attained puberty go to the dormitory after taking their dinner. The boys go to another dormitory facing that of the girls' and separated by about hundred yards. One of the most experienced women of the village remain incharge of the girls' dormitory, and a very senior villager, for the boys' dormitory. The boys and girls do meet and date, but there are definite conventions which are strictly observed. While tribes like *Santhal* and *Oraon* have separate dormitories for boys and girls, the *Muria Gonds* have mixed dormitory. This institution of dormitory provides all kinds of informal education including that of sex. The boys and girls are inculcated with the values and religion of the community in these dormitories. Invariably, the boys and girls after coming to the dormitories dance together for hours. These dances also come under the category of social dance.

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SEASONAL DANCES

Seasons are closely connected with the agricultural operations. Since agriculture is the main stay of the people of India, especially those living in rural areas, seasonal changes are of great importance. Majority of folk dance forms can be said to be seasonal, because they are performed in particular seasons. For instance, all the harvest dances are seasonal. But in this chapter those dances will be discussed which are performed to celebrate or welcome the season. Their connection with the agricultural operations is secondary.

Indians divide the year into six seasons, namely *Grishma* (summer), *Varsha* (rains), *Sharat* (autumn), *Hemanta* (also autumn), *Shishira* (winter), and *vasanta* (spring). The Indian year begins with the lunar month of *Vaishakh* and the solar month of *Mesha*, the beginning of the summer season. The year ends with the lunar month of *Chaitra* and the solar month of *Meena*, the end of spring season.

Most of the seasonal dances are performed either in spring or in autumn. The dances performed during the rains and in winter are predominantly associated with agricultural operations or have ritualistic overtones.

Rayee

One of the many dances that celebrate the spring season is *Rayee* prevalent in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. The cold winter months over, the pleasant spring air inspires village folk to go gay. The

harvest reaped and garnered, create a sense of security. It is the time for the rural folk to hold night long sessions of *Rayee*. It is performed by dancing girls known as *Bedani*. The risqué overtones in their dancing and accompanying songs inspire spontaneous giggles and cat calls. The *Bedani* dancer wears an ample skirt which falls down to the ankles and a chic tight fitting blouse. She covers her upper part of the body with veil called *Odhani*. She wears a broad silver band on her waist. She also wears ornaments on her wrists and arms. The ornament worn over her head is called *Shishphool*, literally meaning head flower. Accompaniment is provided by a drummer who dances with the *Bedani* while playing the drum. The other accompanists do not dance and forming a group they play on the *Timki*, a small drum played with lean bamboo sticks, the *Dhapla*, a side drum, cymbals, and an S-shaped trumpet. They also sing in chorus picking up the refrain from the dancer. In the beginning of the dance invocatory songs are sung which are followed by more mundane songs highlighting the intimate, warm, and earthy aspects of rural life. Love lores naturally abound and the most intimate moments are evocatively portrayed by the dancers.

Bana

In the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh spring season is celebrated with the *Bana* dance. It is performed only by men. Each dancer holds a bamboo stick of about four feet long. Most probably the dance originated as a martial dance. Later, its character changed and it became a joyous dance to celebrate the spring season. The most avid on lookers are young girls of the village. Quite a few of the youthful dancers have their girl-friends in the audience. While dancing, a pair of lovers may exchange meaningful glances and quietly slip out and go to a predetermined place of tryst. None notices a dancer slipping out and again joining the dance. It is said that earlier the *Bana* dancers used to wear masks of different animals, but now none wears a mask. The drum *Dhol* rules the dance. The drummer has to be an expert player, because the tempo varies and the rhythmic phrases are really crisp that inspire

the dancers who dance in circles around the *Dhol* player. Occasionally, *Thali*, a plate like idiophone made of bellmetal is played to enhance the appeal of the percussion music.

Phagnoi

The *Korku* tribal community of Madhya Pradesh performs the *Phagnoi* dance to welcome the spring season. It is performed at the time of Holi which is one of the most important festivals of the *Korku* community. As the name indicates, the dance is performed in the lunar month of *Phagun*, derivative of *Phalgun* corresponding to February/March. It is in this month that Holi festival is celebrated. The dance is performed only by men of all ages. It is a vigorous dance executed with great enthusiasm. The youthful dancers perform it well but some of the dancers advanced in years perform with such verve and dexterity that both onlookers and young dancers are amazed. The songs that accompany the dance is usually of amorous character that goes well with the festive spirit. The dance has acrobatic elements and the accompanying instrumental music is provided by *Ghera* and *Dholak*, the drums and *Jhanj*, the cymbals.

Churkula

In the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh a fascinating dance called *Churkula* is performed close to the Holi festival. Some particular villages like Oomri, Khemri, Sonkh, Mukhrayi etc. specialize in this dance and onlookers from even far off villages come to watch the dance. Different dates near about the Holi festival are fixed for different villages for the performance of the dance. *Churkula* actually is a fabrication of either iron or wood which is like a circular cage that holds 108 burning lamps. This is balanced on the head by the trained female dancer. While balancing the *Churkula* on her head, the dancer also holds in both her hands two burning lamps put on lampstands and balancing the *Churkula* dances mostly in circular movements. It is basically a solo dance and is danced in darkness so that the dancer is not visible clearly, but the



Churkula (Uttar Pradesh)

moving lamps will be visible. It is indeed a fascinating experience to watch *Churkula* in its native atmosphere. The dance is accompanied by a huge drum with one face called *Bamb*. It is put on a wheeled frame work that is pulled by ropes tied to it and the drum is played by more than one players with thick blunt battons. Besides the huge drum, idiophones like *Jhanj* and *Chimta* are also played to provide the percussion music for the dance. When one dancer completes her round the *Churkula* is passed on to the head of another dancer. Since the *Churkula* is quite heavy, the dancers are fed with healthy food for a few months before the performance so that they have the required strength to balance the *Churkula* on their heads on the day of the performance.

Baa Parab

The Santhal and Ho tribal communities living in Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, celebrate the *Baha* or *Baa Parab* in February/March when the *Sal* trees are in bloom. *Parab* means festival. It is the most important festival for the *Santhals* and *Hos*. The region where the two tribal communities live is full of dense forests of tall *Sal* trees. They use the wood and leaves of the *Sal* trees for various purposes. Therefore, they admire the *Sal* trees which are in blossom with the advent of the spring season. *Baha* or *Baa* in the tribal dialect means flowers. On the day the festival begins, the village priest called *Diuri* offers *Sal* flowers to the presiding deity of the village along with the sacrifice of a fowl. During the offering, the ritual is performed strictly according to the tradition. After the ritual, the young girls go to the forest to collect *Sal* flowers. They offer the flowers to their brothers as a token of love and affection. It is similar to the tying of *rakhi* by the girls of non-tribal communities, especially in North India. After the offering of flowers the dance is performed. The girls and the boys stand in two files, facing each other. While dancing, the two files come closer and separate alternatively according to the rhythm. Dances are performed in as many as ten different rhythmic cycles, namely, *Saar*, *Baa*, *Racha*, *Jape*, *Ghanguriya*, *Gaudua*, *Daonria*, *Gena*, *Jadur* and *Khemta*. Some of the rhythmic cycles are influenced by the non-tribal mu-

sis of the region. The drum that rules the dance is called *Mandar* a conical drum with two faces. The melodic content of the accompanying music is provided by *Bansi* the bamboo flute.

The *Munda* tribe of Bihar also celebrate the *Baa Parab*. The tribes are very meticulous about the festival. The songs and dance performed at the festival are never performed at any other time. They will not touch the *Sal* tree or use its leaves for about one month before the festival. They are so particular that they will not even touch the water of a pond where by chance a *Sal* flower falls before the ritual of the festival.

Jadur

Like many tribal communities, the *Oraons* of Chhota Nagpur region of Bihar perform dance to celebrate each of the seasons. They perform *Karma* dance during the rains, *Boroya* dance during the autumn, *Soharai* just before the winter, *Kharia* during spring and *Jadur*, on the threshold of summer towards the end of February and beginning of March. Both men and women participate in the *Jadur* dance. For the musical accompaniment the instruments used are : *Mandar* and *Dholak*, both drums with two faces; *Turbi*, a straight trumpet; *Jhanj*, the cymbals; *Theska*, a wooden idiophone; *Soyenko*, a circular iron rod attached with jinglebells and shaken rhythmically.

Maring

In the Khasi hills of Meghalaya, the *Maring* tribal community celebrates the spring season in a dance performed consecutively for four days. On the first day, rituals are performed and God is prayed for the prosperity of the community. From the second day the dance proper are performed at a particular place called *Madan Duwan-Lyngdoh* where huts have been made with bamboo and grass. The villagers assemble there and the dance begins. Both men and women participate in the dance. The dancers stand in a line putting their hands on the shoulders of the nearby dancers. At both the ends of the line, two men dance holding a shield made of Rhino skin. The dance is

performed in memory of the legendary heroes who fought and defeated the enemies. The most fascinating feature of their costume is the headgear which is decorated by two long feathers of the tail of *Rynnaiw*, a black bird with a long tail. These two feathers are a must. To further decorate the head-gear, feathers of other birds like peacock are also used. The musical accompaniment is provided by the native drums, flutes, and cymbals.

Chaiti Ghoda nata

The fishermen community of Orissa, especially in the district of Ganjam, perform *Chaiti Ghoda nata* in a festival that lasts for about nine days beginning from the full moon day of the lunar month of Chaitra (April). It is a dummy horse dance. Similar dances are performed in other parts of the country, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan. These dances will be discussed in the chapter of Recreational Dances. The dummy-horse dance in Orissa is performed traditionally when the spring season is departing leading to the on set of summer. The fishermen community in Orissa is known as *Kenta*, derived from the Sanskrit word *Kaivarta*. The dance and the festival is closely associated and inspired by an Oriya puranic literature named *Kaivarta Purana* which tells the story behind the fishermen's killing fish. The puranic story in brief is :

The Supreme God slept on the leaf of a banyan tree that floated on the ocean of milk. To keep the leaf-bed steady someone is required to hold the rudder firmly. Therefore, He took some dirt from his ear and shaped a man. He breathed life into the man and asked him to hold the rudder firmly. Once while he was dozing, a gigantic fish came and swallowed up the man. When He did not find the man, the all-knowing God could realize the reason behind the disappearance of the man. He was angry. He caught the fish and pulled out the man from the stomach of the fish. The man was re-engaged in his duty. From that day man became one of the most

vindictive enemy of fish. As ordained by God the first *Kaivarta* (fisherman) and his descendants earn their livelihood by catching fish. A part of the banyan leaf was transformed into a horse. The God ordered *Vishwakarma*, the celestial craftsman, to build a boat. Relieving the man from his duty of holding the rudder of the leaf-bed, He asked the man to cross the ocean in the boat with the horse. The divine horse died on the eighth day of the lunar month of Vaishakha. God consoled the man saying that the horse was the goddess named *Basuli* and her worship will bring him salvation. From that day the *Kaivarta* (*Kenta* in colloquial Oriya) community hold the festival in which goddess *Basuli* is worshipped and the dummy-horse dance is performed.

The festival in honour of goddess *Basuli* and the *Chaiti Ghoda* dance ends on the eighth day of Vaishakha. At times, a female dancer joins the man with the dummy horse. The accompanying music is provided by *Dhol*, the drum, and *Maburi*, the reeded wind instrument like *Shehnai*. We have already discussed the dummy-horse dance of Rajasthan, namely *Kachchi Ghor*, under the category of Social Dances.

In Rajasthan, however, several dances, such as, *Gher*, *Gair Geedad*, *Duff Nach*, *Chang Nach*, *Dandia Gair*, etc. are performed to celebrate the spring season, particularly at the time of Holi festival.

Dandia Gair

The *Dandia Gair* dance is performed only by men on the occasion of the Holi festival held on the full moon day of the lunar month of Phalguna (February/March). The two main aspects that make the dance fascinating are the costume worn by the dancers and the swirling pirouettes executed by them. The dancers wear white *Charidar Pyjamas* and red *Angrakhas*, a gown-like garment highly flared from the waist with numerous pleats. For making one such *Angrakha*, twenty five to thirty meters of cloth is needed. When the

dancers make fast swirling motion, the flared skirt opens up like an umbrella. The dancers move in a spiral-like formation with swirling motion. It is feast for the eyes when the dancers swirl fast. The red and white combination and the moving umbrella-like skirt present a grand spectacle. A long strand of jinglebells (ghungroo) spirals from the ankle upto the knee. The sound of these myriad jinglebells mingles beautifully with the percussion music provided by *Dhol*, *Nagara* (bowl shaped drum with one face), *Thali* (gong-like idiophone) and *Khartal*, the castenets.

Loor and Phagun

In Haryana the *Loor* dance, performed only by women, celebrates the spring sason. It is danced during the later part of the bright fortnight of the



Loor (Haryana)

lunar month of *Phalgun* (February/March). At the time of Holi festival men and women of all ages perform the *Phagun* dance.

Autumn is the other season which inspires celebrative dances almost all over the country. The season is so inspiring because when it comes, the rains are over and the sky is gloriously azure, small patches of white clouds go languorously floating across the sky. This is the time when transplantation of seedlings is over and the villagers are hopeful of a good crop. Many of the dances performed to celebrate the autumn have ritualistic preliminaries which are performed for healthy growth of the plants in the fields.

Dalkhai

In the western part of Orissa, especially in the districts of Sambalpur



Dalkhai (Orissa)

and Phulbani, the *Dalkhai* dance is performed to celebrate the autumn. It is associated with a ceremony known as *Bhaijauntia* which is observed by the women wishing longer life of their brothers. According to the custom prevalent in western Orissa, all the married daughters come back to their parents' house before the *Bhaijauntia* that falls on the eighth lunar day of the bright fortnight of the month of Ashwin (September/October). The sisters wishing long life and prosperity of their respective brothers go with a new earthen pitcher to a stream or a river and fill the pitcher with sand from river bed. A twig of the *Mahua* tree is put on top of the sand. The pitcher is taken to the temple of *Mahamai* (the supreme mother goddess). Offerings are made to the goddess praying her to bless the brothers. While the mother goddess is being worshipped inside the temple *Dalkhai* dance is performed outside. The dancers, while dancing, sing tuneful *Dalkhai* songs in the Sambalpuri dialect. The musical accompanists are all men. The songs, besides describing the beauty of the season, are love songs. The musical instruments used are : *flute*, *Dhol*, *Nishan*, a bowl shaped drum decorated with two deer horns and *Timki*, another smaller bowl shaped drum. Although the ritual is performed only on the first day, the dance is performed till the full moon night that comes after seven days.

Hemant

In southern Orissa, the *Paraja* tribal community of Koraput district perform the autumnal dance called *Hemant*. The autumn includes two seasons : *Sharat*, comprising two lunar months of *Bhadra* and *Ashwina*, and *Hemanta*, comprising the next two lunar months of *Kartik*, and *margasheersa*. Thus the autumn is spread over a period from the later part of August to the later part of November. The *Hemant* dance is performed on the festival called *Nandi Parva* that is held in November. It is also danced only by women. The accompanying songs are known as *Nandi* songs. Musical instruments used with this dance are : *Dhol*, *Nishan*, *Tamak*, and *Mahuri*, the reeded wind instrument.

Madai

Concentration of tribal population is highest in Madhya Pradesh. They constitute 23% of the total population of the State. There are quite a few folk dances performed by both tribal and non-tribal communities. Such a dance is *Madai* named after the fair that is held at the time of Diwali, the festival of lights that falls on the new moon day of the lunar month of Kartik (October/November). Actually, this dance and the fair originally was being organised by the pastoral community called *Abhir*. Later, the community adopted cultivation and are known as Yadav. A legend associated with the festival is as follows :

Madan Abhir is the forebear of the *Abhir* (also called Ahir) community. When he came from the heaven to the earth, he brought a cow with him. All the cattle found now are her numerous progeny. Once an epidemic decimated the cattle herds. Madan Abhir worshipped the *Marhimata* (mother goddess) with great devotion. The goddess was pleased and rooted out the epidemic. Highly obliged Madan Abhir made a silver umbrella and offered to the goddess as a token of deep gratitude. He also organised the *Madai* fair and festival in honour of the goddess. That day is commemorated even now by the community.

In course of time other non-tribal and tribal communities began participating in the fair and the dance. Both men and women participate in the dance. The leader of the group of dancers holds aloft a bamboo shaft, to the upper end of which is tied a bunch of peacock feather. The dancers perform to the lilting tunes of the flute called *Bansuri*. The accompanying percussion musical instruments are : *Mandar*, *Dholak*, *Timki* and *Jhanj* (cymbals). The dancers wear elaborate ornaments made of cowries.

Bilma

The autumnal dance of the *Baiga* tribe of Madhya Pradesh, mostly living

in and around Mandla district, is called *Bilma* which literally means the union of two groups. A group of Baigas living in one place is called *Chak*. Dancers of one *Chak* go to another *Chak*. Dancers of both the *Chaks* perform Bilma together. The accompanying melodic music is provided by *Bansuri* (flute), and the drum music by *Mandar*, *Dholak* and *Timki*.

Jitia

The *Oraon* tribal community living in the highlands of Ranchi in Bihar perform *Jitia* dance towards the later part of autumn in the month of November. Dressed in traditional costumes of red, green, and yellow and wearing brass and silver ornaments, young boys and girls participate in the dance. At the beginning of the dance the boys make a bow-like semi-circular formation and the girls, with arms interlocked, form a circle round the musicians in the centre. The accompanying music is provided by *Mandar*, *Nagara*, *Manjira*, and *Jhal*. The boys form an outer circle. The dancers move backward and forward and at intervals sit down clapping their hands.

Bhadap

The women of the *Kunabi* (also called *Kullabi*) community, considered to be the earliest settlers of Goa, perform the autumnal dance called *Bhadap*, derived from *Bhadrapad* (also called *Bhadrav*), the lunar month corresponding to August/September. *Bhadap* dance is ceremonially performed on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi that falls on the fourth lunar day (*tithi*) of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadrapad. The *Kunabi* women dance it informally throughout the autumn whenever they find an opportunity. The *Kunabis* are agriculturists. During autumn the crops growing in the fields require watching at night to save them from the predatory animals. The menfolk go to the fields after dinner to watch the crops. Women find it an opportune time to dance, especially if it is moonlit night. They often dance through-out the night. Although the dancers are all women the accompanying musicians are all men. The accompanying percussion music is provided by

Ghumat, Samel and Jhanj. The songs that accompany the dance depict the family life, social life and the beauty of the nature. The dancers wear their nine yard handloom saris typically attired. They wear other ornaments including the nose ring.

Riju Dune

The *Gallong* segment of the *Adi* tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh, mostly living in the West Siang district, perform the autumnal dance called *Riju Dune* to welcome the winter. It is therefore performed towards the later part of autumn in November/December. According to a myth of the *Adis* :

Gute Cambre, the summer god, goes back from this world to his original abode in the month of September and along with him summer season quietly departs. It is now time for *Podi-Barji*, the winter god, to visit this world. With the departure of the summer season all the blood sucking insects perish, snakes disappear and human beings feel relieved. *Podi-Barji* visits this world from the later part of October and stays here till the advent of spring.

To welcome the *Podi-Barji*, the *Gallongs* perform the *Riju Dune* dance. Both men and women participate in the dance. The dancers stand in three rows holding each other's hands. The leader of the dance is called *Miri*. He sings and brandishes his sword called *Dao* which produces a tinkling sound since iron rings are loosely incorporated in the sword. The dancers repeat the line sung by the *Miri* and swinging their hands go forward and backward. There are four movements in the dance and each movement begins with a new stanza of the song rendered by the *Miri*. The female dancers wear a typical costume called *Jese-Kore*, which is a white *lungi*-like skirt with a black border at the bottom and a black band with design in the middle. The costume also includes a red blouse. They wear around their necks necklaces made of coloured beads and very large size earrings. The male dancers wear white loin cloth and a black sleeveless jacket called *Labuk*. No musical instrument other than the *Dao* is used.

Namagen

The *Kinnauri* tribal community of Himachal Pradesh perform the *Namagen* dance to celebrate the autumn. It is formally performed in September and informally at other times of the year. Both men and women participate in the dance. The women wear *Gachi*, the upper garment, and a shawl called *Pattu*. They also wear various silver ornaments. The men wear *pyjama* and shirt-like upper garments. Musical accompaniment is provided by *Kangarange*, a chordophone, *Bhopal*, a wind instrument, flute, and *Damane* and *Anga*, the drums.

In fact, as said before, majority of folk dances of this country are performed formally in particular seasons. There are quite a few dances which are not allowed to be performed informally during any other season than the specified. Others are not so strict about the traditional performance season and are performed as entertainment.



GAME AND MARTIAL DANCES

War and dance now appear antithetical, but it was not so in ancient days when there were no aeroplanes, no bombs, no ballistic missiles and even no guns. The weapons like sword, club, spear, etc., were quite weighty and to wield them with consummate artistry required such pliability of the body as a dancer only could have. That is why probably in the Mahabharata, Vyasa advised Yudhishthira to learn the art of dancing, and Arjuna, the greatest of the heroes of that time, was a dancer of considerable calibre. While he, with his four brothers and wife, had to remain incognito for a year, under the name of Brihannala, he was teaching dance to Uttara, the princess of the Virat kingdom. At the time of that antiquated past, men at arms used to parade the artistry of wielding the weapons to the beat of drums. Out of this practice originated several forms of dance which are still surviving in many parts of this country.

Every game has an inherent rhythm of its own. In most of the cases it is so covert that unless very carefully observed it is not perceptible. In India several traditional games evolved in which rhythm was taken as the base. They are, therefore, both game and dance.

Thang-Ta

Among the martial dances some are not much stylized and their martial character is obvious. Some are so stylized that careful analysis only reveals their martial character. One of the martial dance of former kind is *Thang-Ta* of Manipur. *Thang* means sword and *Ta* means spear. The dance is performed



Thang-Ta (Manipur)

with other weapons also. It is basically a mock fight of attack and defence. Traditionally various kinds of martial dances are performed on the concluding day of the *Lal Haroba* (q.v. under Ritual Dances) festival. The tradition is very ancient and its reference is found in many myths peculiar to Manipur. The myth connected with the martial crafts is as follows:

A progeny of *Teen Sidaba*, who is the progenitor of the ancient Manipuri race called *Meitei*, was lost having been caught in the ancient fish trap of *Thongnang* and the various parts of his body became different kinds of sword, knives, other weapons and tools. *Teen Sidaba* is an aspect of *Pakhangba*, the God. When *Pakhangba* springs into the core of the sun and remains there inside the golden casket, he is known as *Teen Sidaba*. It is *Pakhangba* who originated the *Thang-Ta*.

There are two kinds of swordplay : the make-believe kind is called *Leiteng Thang*, and the actual fight is called *Yanna Thang*. Generally, the former kind is performed as dance.

Kalaripayattu

In Kerala the basic martial art is called *Kalaripayattu*. The influence and elements of this martial tradition are found in many dance and theatre forms of Kerala. In some forms of dance and theatre the elements of *Kalaripayattu* is obvious, in others though not so evident, it is not also totally transformed. Kerala had a very long and rich martial tradition. The heroic warrior displayed prowess, heroism, courage and other traits display the ethos that shaped *Kalaripayattu* and it became a dominant aspect of medieval Kerala culture. The main aspects of this martial art are:

- (a) A distinctive kind of oil massage of the whole body to make it supple and extremely pliable.



Kalaripayattu (Kerala)

- (b) Typical exercises to make the body stronger and pliable.
- (c) Practising some yoga - like postures named after animals like horse, cat, elephants etc.
- (d) Wielding of weapons like sword, shield, spear, etc. together with the techniques of attack and defence with appropriate stepping, jump, turn etc.

These aspects, either all of them or partly, are found in several forms of dance and theatre including Kathakali, the classical theatre form of Kerala. Some of the main dances that evolved out of *Kalaripayettu* are : *Kolkali*, *Parichhamuttumkali*, *Velakali*, *Oachirakali* and *Yatrakali*.

Kolkali

It is interesting to note that not only Hindus, but Muslims and Christians also learn and perform *Kalaripayettu* as well as some of the dances mentioned above. For instance, the *Kolkali* dance is performed by both Hindus and Muslims. It is a vigorous dance in which dancers wield two feet long sticks and move in circular formation attacking and defending with the sticks. While dancing they sing particular songs in a lusty folk style. The songs are called *Bhadarmuni Pattukal*, i.e., Sword fighting Songs. Generally, middle aged men, who have perfected the techniques participate in the dance. The group consists of twelve to twenty dancers. Small cymbals and smaller kind of *Chenda*, the drum provide the percussion music for the dance.

Parichhamuttumkali

Parichhamuttumkali (shield-hitting dance) is another dance which is performed by both the Hindus and the Muslims. The dancers hold a stick and a shield in their hands. Most probably earlier instead of sticks the dancers were using swords. The training of this dance is much similar to that of the *Kalaripayettu*. The dance is similar to *Kolkali*, but the songs are different and are sung to the rhythm provided only by the cymbals. The performers strike stick against stick or stick against shield. The deep bends and body extension required in the performance,

as also the leaps and turns, have great similarity with those of *Kalaripayattu*.

Velakali

In the Alleppey district of southern Kerala, the *Nair* community traditionally perform the *Velakali* dance. It is generally performed at the time of temple festivals held from March to May. But the most important and impressive performance of the dance is presented at the time of the ten-day *Utsavam* festival held in honour of Lord Padmabhabhaswami of Thiruvantapuram. Some hereditary families of the *Nair* community have exclusive rights to perform in front of the temple at the time of *Utsavam* which is held in the lunar month of *Phalguna* corresponding to March/April. *Velakali*



Velkali (Kerala)

customarily danced under the supervision of *Mathu Panikkar*. Before the dancing begins, a flourish of trumpets and kettle-drums gives the call. The dance has elements of theatre, since it depicts the fight between the Kauravas and Pandavas of the epic poem Mahabharata. The dancers represent the Kauravas. The Pandavas are represented not by men but by dummy figures. The dancers dance around these dummies flourishing their sword and shield held in their hands. The symbolic fight lasts for about an hour during which the dancers dance and jump vigorously around the dummies. Since the Pandavas were the victors, the dancers at the end of the dance retreat hastily to the steps of the temple. This kind of enactment is not done in front of smaller temples in the district of Alleppy. There, the dance does not have the grandeur of the *Velakali* performed in Thiruvantapuram.

Oachirakali

Oachirakali is another dance in which mass mock combat is performed. The dance is named after the village named *Oachira* which has the temple of Lord Parabrahma. A five-day festival is held every year around the middle of June. The festival is quite popular and thousands attend it either as spectators or as worshippers. It is believed that if worship is done here childlessness and a score of diseases will be cured. Several troupes of *Oachirakali* come to perform during the festival. Each troupe has a leader and the dance is performed to the leader's verbal commands called *Vayttari*. The commands are in the form of nonsensical syllables which the dancers repeat loudly and perform the set movements. The group mock fight is the enactment of a legendary war. According to a local legend *Kayamkulam Raja*, a medieval ruler of the kingdom in which *Oachira* village is located, fought a battle with the then king of Travancore. The dance is re-enactment of that battle.

Yatrakali

Yatrakali is performed by some of the sub-groups of Brahmins who are slightly lower in rank in the hierarchy. The dance is known through various other names like *Sanghakali*, *Shastrakali*, *Chattirakali*, *Panankali* etc. Many kinds

of martial movements and exercises of *Kalaripayettu* are performed in this dance.

Silambattam

The martial dance of Tamil Nadu is called *Silambattam*. The dancers do mock combat with various weapons, such as sticks, clubs, swords, horns, daggers etc., one kind of weapon at a time. The mock combat is done in pairs. In fact, a kind of competition takes place between the combating pairs. The dancer who outsmarts the opponent dancer is lustily cheered by the audience. The drum music for the dance is provided by *Sendai Melam*, i.e. group of three to four drummers playing the drum *Sendai* in unison.

Paika Nacha and Paikali

In Orissa two kinds of martial dance are prevalent. In the Khurdha region of Puri district *Paika Nacha* is performed. In Oriya, *Paika* means a soldier. *Paika Nacha* is not much stylized. The dancers perform various kinds of physical feats rhythmically to the beats of the drums. Some of the dance movements have acrobatic elements. On the other hand the *Paikali* dance which now survives in northern Orissa, especially in the districts of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar, is a much stylized form of dance. It is marked for its leg extensions and stylized gaits which are very much similar to those of the widely known *Chhau* dances. Each of the *Paikali* dancers hold a sword in the right and a shield in the left hand. While dancing they also sing in a recitative style. They smear their bodies with a whitish kind of earth called *Kaimati*. A major segment of the dance is mock attack-and-defence called *Ruk-maar-nachà* which is the foundation of the *Chhau* dances. The orchestral music that accompanies *Paikali* is as rich as appealing. The orchestra consists of three kinds of drum, such as *Dhol*, a barrel shaped drum that dominates the music, *Dhumsa*, a huge kettledrum made of wood and *Chadchadi*, somewhat like snare drum. The melodic music is provided by *Mahuri*, a reeded wind instrument like *Shehnai* but with a sharper timber. The much evolved *Chhau* (q.v. under Recreational Dances) comprises the same musical instruments. Watching *Paikali* one will be convinced that it is the precursor of *Chhau* dances.

Chholia

The *Chholia* martial dance is prevalent in the Kumaon region of Uttar Pradesh. Although it is unmistakably a martial dance, now it is performed usually as part of marriage procession, especially of the Rajputs. They dance in pairs holding sword and shield. With complicated steppings the dancers perform a mock combat of attack and defence. It requires great skill and practice to perform the dance with proficiency. The dancers are all male, but when it is performed at the time of *Kirji-Kumbh* festival women also participate in the dance. Because, according to a legend the kingdom named *Swarnagotra*, of which this region was a part, was ruled only by women, and the festival is held in remembrance of that golden era. *Kirji* is an extremely poisonous flower that blossoms once in twelve years. As soon as the flower blossoms villagers go in a procession to destroy the flower so that its pollen or petals do not make the water sources poisonous. The *Chholia* dance is performed as part of this procession. Drumming is the main accompanying music embellished with the sounding of *Trurbi*, the U-shaped trumpet and *Ransingha*, a kind of horn.

Teri Chha

The Rengma Naga tribal community of Kohima district in Nagaland perform the martial dance called *Teri Chha*. Actually it is a kind of training to prepare the young men of the village for a war. It is performed on important festive occasions so that the trained ones do not forget the techniques of war. The dance has three phases. In the first phase the dancers depict the war preparations. In the second phase the techniques of attack and defence are executed. The third phase depicts victory over the enemy and the dance ends with a ritual ceremony.

There are several martial dances prevalent in almost all the regions of the country. All these dances have in common the following aspects :

- (a) Rhythmic display of the techniques of wielding weapons in a skillful manner;

- (b) Mock combat in pairs or a group divided into two and when one group attacks the other defends and vice versa;
- (c) Incorporation of acrobatic elements;
- (d) In the accompanying music drums dominate.

Lezim

As said earlier when a game is played to the rhythm of accompanying music, which may be only vocal or only instrumental or both, it acquires the character of a dance. Such a dance is *Lezim* prevalent in Maharashtra. The dance is named after a wooden idiophone to which is loosely fitted thin metal pieces that produces a sonorous sound when shaken by the dancers while dancing. It is a vigorous dance performed by men only. Various kinds of physical feats are performed in the dance. Since the dance is good for body building, it is not only practised in gymnasiums but also in many schools of Maharashtra as drill. Earlier no song accompanied the dance and a *Dholki* was providing the percussion music. Nowadays, at times, *Ranhalgi*, a kind of frame drum, with other kinds of indigenous drums like *Varandi*, and *Ghumke*, are being played with the dance. Specially written songs are also accompanying it.

Puchi

The game dance of Orissa is known as *Puchi*. It is also a kind of artistic drill performed by girls, especially by those who are unmarried. This dance helps shape the waistline, legs, and hips. There is no choreography for the dance. A group of girls squat on the ground and begin singing particular kind of songs. To the rhythm of the song the girls stretch out alternatively the right and the left foot while maintaining the squatting position. The girls perform *Puchi* with a competitive spirit to see which girl can out do everyone in the group. No musical instrument is used with this dance. although the girls perform *Puchi* any day and at any time, customarily it is performed on the full moon night of the lunar month of *Ashwin*. In Orissa this night is celebrated as *Kumar Poornima*. All the unmarried boys and girls wear new clothes and worship the rising moon. It is believed that if the moon is worshipped later than

the time of rising, the marriage will be delayed. The unmarried boys and girls generally do not sleep at night and enjoy themselves by playing different kinds of traditional games. The girls on this night play *Puchi*, in batches, almost all throughout the night.

Kikli, Phugadi and Jimma

There are many game dances in different parts of this country. In Punjab and Kashmir the girls perform *Kikli* which is somewhat similar to the *Phugadi* and *Jimma* of Maharastra. In fact, there are different kinds of *Phugadi*.

□□□

DRUM DANCES

Drums undoubtedly lead the percussion instruments. In India there are more than 200 different kinds of drums. Perhaps no country can surpass India in the range and variety of drums. Indian music, be it classical, folk, or tribal, requires drum accompaniment. *Tabla*, *Pakhawaj*, *Mridangam* etc., are classical drums. *Dhol*, or its smaller variety *Dholak* are typical folk drums. *Mandar* is a typical tribal drum. The concept of *Taal*, i.e., time-cycle, in Indian music is unique. The Western musical time moves like a sine wave, but *Taal*, the Indian musical time, moves in cycles. In a *Taal* there are fixed number of beats and the accents on different beats are patterned differently. For instance, the *Taals* called *Dhamar*, *Deepchandi*, *Jhumra*, and *Aadtaali*, all have fourteen beats in a cycle. But the distribution of accents are different, for which each of the said *Taals* give different aesthetic appeal. Indian dances too, be it classical, folk, or tribal, require drum accompaniment. There are, of course, a few folk and tribal dances which are not accompanied with drums but other percussion instruments. Overwhelming majority of Indian dances, however, are accompanied with drum music. Generally the drummer provides the percussion accompaniment with dances. There are, however, quite a few dances in which the dancer himself plays the drum while dancing. Such dances come under the category of drum dance, some of which will be discussed in this chapter.

Pung Cholan

One of the finest example of drum dance is the fascinating *Pung Cholan* of Manipur. It is a highly sophisticated dance with all the elements of a so



Pung Cholam (Manipur)

called classical dance. *Pung* is a drum with two faces. One face, usually played with the right hand, is much smaller than the other. The drum is slung from the neck of the drummer for playing with both the hands. *Pung Cholam* is performed either solo or in a group. At times, about a hundred drummers perform the dance all wearing spotlessly white *dhoti* and white turban. It is then a treat for the eyes, ears, and mind. The aesthetic appeal is so over-powering that it becomes an experience for the life time. While playing intricate rhythmic passages on the drums, the drummers not only dance gracefully and vigorously, but also swings the drum in incredible ways, all the while playing. There are also acrobatic elements in the dance.

Actually, *cholam* is a generic name of percussion dances prevalent in Manipur. *Cholams* performed by men are vigorous having acrobatic elements. Those performed by women are delicate and lyrical. The style of dance changes

as the percussion instrument changes. Men perform two other drum dances with *Dhol* and *Daph*, a frame drum. Men also perform *Kartaal Cholam*. *Kartaal* is a pair of large cymbals. The *cholams* performed by women are not with drums, but with idiophones like clappers and smaller cymbals. Among all the *cholams*, the *Pung Cholam* is the best.

Ghumra

The *Ghumra* is another interesting drum dance prevalent in Orissa in the districts of Sambalpur, Balangir and Kalahandi. The dance is named after the pitcher-like drum. Its body is made from terracotta. The neck of the drum is like a hollow cylinder. On its mouth is tautly tied the skin of *Godhi*, a lizard-like reptile. The drum is slung from the neck of the dancer and tied at the back so that its face is near the chest. The dancers play on the face with both their hands. The dance is performed only by men. The dancers wear coloured *dhotis* tightly and coloured jackets. They wear turbans clipped with peacock feathers. A belt with jinglebells called *ghaagudi* is fastened to each dancer's waist and *ghungroos* on both the ankles. One dancer, without the *Ghumra*, drum holds two bunches of long peacock feathers in both of his hands. He dances with the group making funny movements and sounds that add a humorous element to the performance. In the beginning, the dancers stand in two rows and play on their *Ghumra* drums. Then they dance playing on their drums. After that, they stand in rows and the accompanying vocalist sings a couplet from the repertory of songs specified for the dance. At times, he may sing couplets composed or improvised by him. While the vocalist is singing the dancers remain standing and play softly on their drums. As soon as the couplet is complete, the dancers play on their drums loudly and dance vigorously. Although the dance is performed on some festive occasions, customarily it is danced on the day of *Gamha Poornima* that falls on the full moon day of the lunar month of *Shravan* (July/August).

Dollu Kunita

The *Dollu Kunita* is the drum dance of Karnataka. It is also danced by only men and is quite a vigorous dance having elements of acrobatics. This

dance is performed by the *Kuraba* (shepherd) community living in the districts of Chitradurga, Shimoga and Bellary. A legend is associated with the dance. The legend in short is as follows :

Shiva, the Lord of Kailas mountain, pleased with the *tapasya* of a demon devotee, granted him the wish of having the Lord inside his body. When Lord Shiva entered into the body of the demon, the Kailas becomes gloomy and unworthy of living. Lord Vishnu was approached to find a solution for the problem. With divine powers Vishnu severed the body of the demon and brought out Lord Shiva who did not like it at all. To pacify Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu made a drum out of the torso of the demon. That drum is *Dollu*. Lord Vishnu took the drum and started dancing while playing it. That was the first *Dollu Kunita* that pacified Lord Shiva. From that day to please Lord Shiva the dance is performed by the *Kuraba* community.

In many parts of the country drums with two faces, which are slung from the neck for playing are called either *Dhol* or *Dholak*. Generally *Dhol* is barrel shaped. *Dollu* is cylindrical and shorter in length. The body is made of Bine wood. While the left face of the drum is of goat skin, the right is of sheep skin. The dancers play the drums loudly and dance vigorously. While dancing the drummers-cum-dancers make a pyramidal formation of three or four tiers by getting up on the shoulders of other dancers. The drumming of the dancers is complemented by indigenous trumpets, flute and cymbals.

Warli Dhol

Dhol dances are prevalent in Maharashtra and in Kumaon-Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh. In Maharashtra the *Warli* tribal community living especially in Thane district perform *Dholcha Nach* which is similar to *Dollu Kunita*. The *Warli* dancers also form a human pyramid during their performance.

Bhil Dhol

The *Dhol* dance prevalent in the Kumaon-Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh is performed by the *Bhil* tribal community. Like all drum dances this is also performed by men only. Two kinds of dancers participate in the dance. Almost half of the group are drummer-cum-dancers. The other half of the group hold naked swords in their mouth while dancing. They do not sling the drum from their necks. Although there are acrobatic elements in the dance, human pyramid is not formed in this dance.

Dappu

There are quite a few drum dances in which the dancers play frame drums while dancing. The most elaborate is the *Dappu* dance of Andhra Pradesh. Some communities belonging to the Backward Class in Adilabad district perform the dance. *Dappu* is a round frame drum. The dancers play the drum while dancing. There are five different varieties of *Dappu* dance depending upon the pattern of stepping. When the dancers tap the ground with their feet alternately, the dance is called *Majili Dappu* and it is customarily danced at the time of Dussehra (September/October). In the *Ata Dappu* variety, the dancers take two consecutive steps on the accented beat of the rhythm and it is performed at the time of a marriage ceremony. The *Holi Dappu* is performed at the time of the Holi festival (February/March). In this variety the dancers take three consecutive steps on the accented beat of the rhythm. In *Pochamma Dappu* the dancers take four consecutive steps and it is performed to invoke the goddess *Pochamma*. In the *Rolatam Dappu*, performed on important festive occasions, the dancers take five consecutive steps.

Tappeta Gullu

Another frame drum dance called Tappeta Gullu is prevalent in Andhra Pradesh, especially in the districts of Srikakulam and East Godavari. Tappeta is a small frame drum which is tied to the chest of each dancer. The dancers wear short pants and tie anklebells on both their ankles. While dancing they play the frame drum. The sound of the drum and anklebells blend well with

the songs that accompany the dance. The songs usually are inspired by Krishna legend. The vocalist sings a couplet while the dancers play on the drum softly. The last word of the couplet is repeated by all the dancers loudly in chorus and then play the drum also loudly and dance vigorously. The dance has passages containing acrobatic elements.

Tappettai

In Tamil Nadu the frame drum is called *Tappettai*. It is larger in size and is played both by hand and stick. Although the *Tappettai* dance is performed all over the State, it is more popular in the districts of Salem, Madurai, Thanjavur, and Coimbatore. Generally the dance is performed at the time of temple festivals.

Tappumelakkali

The frame drum dance of Kerala, called *Tappumelakkali* is performed by communities, such as, *Vettuvar*, *Ezhava*, *Parayan*, and *Cherumakkal*. In this dance two kinds of drums are played : *Tappu*, the frame drum , and *Chenda*, a cylindrical drum with two faces but played on one face with lean sticks by slinging it vertically from the neck. Generally, the number of *Tappus* is three times that of the *Chendas*. Usually, the group consists of four *Chendas* and twelve *Tappus*. The frame drum is played with a short but thick stick.

Dhemali

The *Dhemali* of Assam is not really a drum dance, but a preliminary (*poorvaranga*) of the traditional theatre known as *Ankianat* or *Bhawana*. Before the play begins the *Dhemali* is performed. There are various kinds of *Dhemali*. The *Chahini Dhemali* is a kind of drum dance, somewhat like *Pung Cholan* of Manipur, but having much subdued dancing. The drum played is called *Khol* and almost similar to the *Pung* of Manipur. When a large number of drummer-dancers, with all white dress, perform a *Dhemali*, especially in a moonlit night, it presents a sight that is as impressive as aesthetically satisfying.

DANCES OF BOYS AS GIRLS

There are not many folk dances in which boys perform dressed as girls, but the tradition of female impersonation, especially in traditional theatre forms, is a custom that deserves discussion. In India, theatre without dance could not be conceived. Theatre is called *Natya* in Sanskrit as also in many regional languages. The verbal root of *Natya* is *nat* that means 'to dance'. There are more than 60 different styles of traditional theatrical forms in this country. In almost all the theatrical forms men play the female roles, even today. Since dancing and singing are integral part of the art of acting (*abhinaya*), all the actors who play female roles should have talent for dancing. This tradition of female impersonation in the field of dance and theatre started in India from around 16th century. There is a historical reason behind this.

Earlier dance was being considered as the best of all arts. Because art, like music exists only in time, not in space; whereas arts like sculpture and painting exist only in space, not in time. It is only dance and theatre that exist both, in time and in space. Again, the beauty of the human body can be enhanced in two ways : by makeup, jewellery etc. and by dance. While the former is superficial, dance wells up from within. Another most important reason is that Indian traditional thinkers were of the opinion that the artist engaged in creative activity can spontaneously experience the divine (see the second chapter). Because of all these reasons dance was considered in ancient India as an art with which the God can be worshipped. Therefore, there was the tradition of consecration of dancing girls (*devadasi*) in the temples. There are a number of references that princes and princesses were

learning dance and performing before an audience. This ethos underwent a transformation when India came under the rules of foreigners. Those who ruled had a different kind of culture and ethos according to which dancing was exhibition of the body and therefore decent girls should not dance. In a feudalistic society the values of the ruler are adopted by the ruled. Thus Indians began considering that decent women should neither dance nor appear on the stage. It became so ingrained in Indian mind that a saying became common that 'those who have some element of shame they only play musical instruments, those who do not have it they sing, but who is totally shameless dances'. In such an ethos, actresses were not available for playing female roles in a play. The theatre thinkers then thought that a character in a play is basically a symbol. A female character in a drama is the symbol of femininity, not the model of a woman. Therefore, a talented actor can bring to life the symbol of femininity. Thus began the practice of female impersonation in the field of traditional theatre. The tradition of solo dancing, especially the classical ones, was continued by male dancers. The girls who took to dancing were generally courtesans. This taboo of women dancing was observed by elite and the higher caste people. Fortunately, this did not percolate to the tribal communities or the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy. As a result, most of the group folk dances continue to be performed by these people. In the vast body of Indian folk dances there are a few specks of solo dancing by boys dressed as girls, some of which will be discussed in this chapter.

Bachcha Nagma

In Kashmir valley the dance called *Bachcha Nagma* is prevalent which is a solo dance performed by a boy, usually in his early teens, dressed as a girl. It is said that earlier a class of women dancers called *Hafizas* used to perform this kind of dance. They also used to sing *Sufiana Kalam*, the traditional sophisticated music of Kashmir valley. When the tradition of the *Hafizas* died out, *Bachcha Nagma* came out of that tradition. The teenaged dancer sings and

dances. The orchestra that accompanes him consists of *Rabab*, a plucked type of chordophone; *Shehnai*, the reeded wind instrument; the *Dugi- tabla* pair which in Kashmir is called *Dukra*; and, at times, *Tumbaknadi*, a drum with one face and shaped like a pitcher, is also included in the orchestra.

Gotipua

Counterparts of *Bachcha Nagma* are found in Orissa, Assam, and among the *Tharu* community of Uttar Pradesh. In Orissa the teenaged boys who perform the dance are called *Gotipua*. The *Gotipua* dance evolved around 17th century. In southern Orissa, especially in the district of Ganjam, the dance is called *Sakhi Nacha*. The tradition evolved around 17th century. The temple dancers called *Maharis* could not get the enthusiastic patronage of royal court. As a result, their dancing started declining for lack of proper training in dance. The *Raj-nartaki* class of dancers who were dancing at the royal court and also for the public during festivals like *Vasantotsava*, also disappeared owing to lack of patronage, since the royal nobilities preferred more sensual dance of the courtesans called *Baiji*. To cater to the general public the tradition of *Gotipua* evolved. During 17th and 18th century a number of talented Oriya poets wrote countless lyrics and poems suitable for singing, on the theme of the love between Radha and Krishna. Although lyrics were written in a simpler language, the poems are highly ornate. Generally, the *Gotipuas* sing these songs and poems and present expressional numbers with highly stylized gestural acting (*abhinaya*). During the later part of 19th century and early decades of 20th century some kind of decadence crept into the *Gotipua* dance and it became more sensual than sensuous. In the 1940s' when the Odissi dance was revived much was offered by the repertoire of the *Gotipuas*. Following the classicism of the revived Odissi dance, the *Gotipuas* discarded the decadent elements. At present, their dance has been much influenced by the revived Odissi dance. Musical accompaniment is provided by *Mardala*, a *Pakhawaj*-like drum with two faces; *Gini*, small cymbals and Harmonium. The dancer sings the song which is repeated by guru and a supporting vocalist when the

dancer elaborates on the meaning of the song or poem through gestural acting.

Sattriya

In 16th century, *Shankaradeva*, a devout Vaishnava and a creative genius of Assam, shaped a stylized theatre to give vent to his spiritual feelings. He wrote several *Ankianats*, i.e., one act plays, the performance of which is called *Bhawana*, literally meaning contemplation or meditation. The *Ankianats* were performed in the Vaishnava monasteries called *Sattras*. In *Bhawana* performance, female roles are played by boys. The performance includes several solo dance passages which are performed by the boys. When these solo passages are performed not as a part of the drama but independent



Sattriya (Assam)

presentation, they are called *Sattriya* dance. The dance is accompanied by singing and percussion music of *Khol*, the drum with two faces much like the *Pung* of Manipur, and *Manjira*, small cymbals.

The couterpart in Andhra Pradesh is the *Kuchipudi* dance. *Kuchipudi* is actually a tradition of dance drama which has solo dance passages like the *Bhawana*. When the solo passages are presented independently it is also called *Kuchipudi*. Since it has been accepted as a classical style of dance, it is not discussed here. In fact, both the *Gotipua* dance and the *Sattriya* dance are more sophisticated than most of the folk dances and have classical elements like the dance of *Maibis* of Manipur.

Tharuha

Among the *Tharu* community of Kumaon region of Uttar Pradesh, *Tharuha* dance is prevalent in which a boy dressed as a girl performs. The *Tharuha* dancers are also skillful as the *Gotipuas* and the *Sattriya* dancers. There are vaious kinds of dance movements, of which some have acrobatic elements. A dancer while dancing, at times, spins a large brass plate on the tip of the forefinger of the right hand. The dancers are in a sense professionals since payment is made to them for their performance. They are accompanied by the drummer who plays *Mridanga*, a drum with two faces. He also sings while playing the drum. A few musicians play cymbals. The musicians form a circle and at the centre the *Tharuha* dancer performs.



RECREATIONAL DANCES

Lastly we come to the most extensive category of folkdances. There are countless forms of Recreational Dances prevalent all over the country. The performance of these dances while giving recreational pleasures to the dancers, entertains the onlookers. Under this category of dances are included those forms of folk dances which have unmistakable elements of theatre. As mentioned earlier, there is a very thin line between dance and theatre in India. There are several theatre forms in which dance is the most dominant dramatic expression. As in *Kathakali*, any form of dance that has expressional passages has theatrical elements. Many of the dances discussed in this chapter are traditionally performed on a particular occasion or season, but they are being considered under this category because entertainment is the predominant objective of the performance. Most of them are associated with festivals and their performance imparts the desired festive atmosphere to the festivals .

Rouf and Hikar

In the Kashmir valley two kinds of joyous dance are performed, especially when the spring season majestically approaches the valley with all its grandeurs. The one danced only by girls is called *Rouf* and the other is which both boys and girls participate called *Hikar*. In both the dances the songs that the dancers sing are basically romantic in character. In *Rouf* the girls stand in two rows facing each other. The dancers of each row interlock themselves by putting the hands at the back side of the flanking two dancers. The stepping



Rouf (Jammu & Kashmir)

and dance movements are simple. On the rhythmic beats they come one step forward and on the next beat go backward. Their torsos are, delicately and lyrically, bent forward and backward in consonance with the stepping. In *Hikat* a boy and a girl become dancing partners and hold each other with extended hands. All the dancers sing while dancing. Musical accompaniment is provided usually by *Rabab*, the plucked type of string instrument and *Tumbaknadi*, the drum typical of Kashmir.

Jabro

Another joyous dance called *Jabro* is prevalent in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, especially in the *Chang Thang* area situated at a very high

altitude. The people who live in this area are mostly nomads. Their main source of livelihood is livestock, such as yak, sheep, and goat. *Jabro* is very popular among these people. It has now become popular in other parts of Ladakh. Both men and women participate in the dance. It begins with a slower tempo which goes on increasing. *Jabro* is danced for hours, especially in silvery moonlit nights. The musical accompaniment is provided by *Damnyan*, a stringed instrument much like the *Rabab*.

Naati

In Himachal Pradesh a variety of *Naati* dances are performed. One kind has already been discussed under Ceremonial Dances. There are about 13



Naati (Himachal Pradesh)

different kinds of *Naati*. For special occasions three kinds of *Naati* dances are performed which are known as *Dhili*, *Pheti* and *Bashari*. Both men and women participate in the dance. The *Naati* dancers wear typical costumes. The female dancers wear *Thipu*, a squarish red scarf tied over the head; *Kurti*, a kind of colourful upper garment usually made of velvet; *Pattu*, the main upper garment beautifully embroidered; *Suthan*, a trouser-like garment usually made of colourfully printed cloth; *Puhla*, shoes made of a kind of fibre. They also wear typical jewellery, such as *Gorkhadu*, the ear ornament made of gold; *Long*, a top for the nose; *Chandarhaar*, a long and heavy necklace made of silver; and *Kanganu* or *Mridri*, bangles made of solid silver. The costume for the male dancers consists of *Topa Kalagi*, a woollen cap with one side rolled up; *Balay*, big earrings made of solid gold; *Chopla*, white woollen upper garment; *Patka*, a scarf, one tied around the waist and another across the shoulder; *Pyjama*, white trouser-like garment and *Pula*, the shoes. The orchestra that accompanies the dance consists of *Dhol*, the drum with two faces *Nakara*, a bowl shaped drum with one face; *Shehnai*, the wind instrument; *Narshingha*, an S-shaped trumpet; and *Karnal*, the straight trumpet.

Tharu

The *Tharu* tribal community, living mainly in the Nainital-Gorakhpur belt, has three major sub-clans, namely, *Rana*, *Kathariya* and *Dangaura*. The *Kathariyas* perform a dance that is called *Tharu*, after the tribe name. It begins eight days before the Holi festival and culminates on the day of the of Holi. Unmarried boys and girls participate in the dance with great enthusiasm. According to the custom of the Tharus, the bride does not go to her in-laws just after the marriage. She continues to stay with her parents. Such a girl may participate in the dance provided she has not become a mother as yet. The dancers sing joyously while dancing. *Dhol*, the barrel shaped drum, provides the percussion music for the dance. During the course of dance, the group is divided into two and often the dance movements of one group differs from that of the other, but both groups dance to the same rhythmic beats.

Sayna

The *Janusar Bavar* tribal community performs the *Sayna* dance at the time of Diwali festival. The dance is also performed on other festive occasions. Generally, the married girls come to their parental homes at the time of Diwali. They with their friends perform the dance. The dancers are all girls but the musicians are all men. The dancers sing while dancing and, at times, the songs are in the form of questions and answers. Towards the finale the dancers, some or all, spin large brass plates on the tip of the forefinger of their right hands. They wear their best dress for the dance.

Chaufla

Chaufla is an interesting dance of the Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh. It is not limited to a particular community. Men and women of any community living in the village may participate in the dance provided they know how to perform it. Men and women stand opposite each other. While dancing they clap their hands with that of the dancing partners. The steppings are complex and the partners dance in a perfectly synchronized manner. The dancers sing particular songs while dancing. Instrumental music is not used with this dance.

Nak Cheng Rennie

Rava or *Rabhas* are a *Bodo* speaking matriarchial tribal community of North Bengal. Their dialect is close to that of the *Garos*. Since they live in close proximity to the Hindus, the *Rabhas* have assimilated a number of traits of their neighbours into their cultural matrix. The *Rabhas* are a small community and their population is less than 5000. The dance named *Nak Cheng Rennie*, literally meaning the dance of catching prawns, has no religious association and can be performed at any time. The dance is a kind of stylized and suggestive depiction of catching prawns from hilly brooks. The dancers use *jokkoi* and *khalai* which are actually used in prawn catching. The dancers are all girls, but the musical accompanists are all men. While the melodic

accompaniment is provided by the female vocalist and *Barangshi*, a bamboo flute, the percussion is by *Hem*, a drum with two faces: *Dandi*, a bamboo made idiophone; *Barding*, another interesting idiophone; and a rare tribal instrument made of a long piece of bamboo with a buffalo horn at the lower end.

Kar-gnok-Lok

The *Lepcha* tribal community of Sikkim performs an interesting dance called *Kar-gnok-lok*, literally meaning dance of the swans. The dance is related to the migration of swans from warm plains to the cooler Himalayan regions when summer approaches and return to the plains when winter comes. These migratory birds indicate to the *Lepchas* when to sow the seeds and when to harvest the crops. Therefore, a legend has been inspired by the swans. It tells the story of the sojourn of a group of migratory swans led by *Gnonpo Geubu* and his wife *Jhum Thi*. When the *Lepchas* see that the swans have started migrating to the cooler regions in February/March, they begin their sowing, and when the swans return to the plains in October/November, they know that the time has come for harvesting the crops. The legend tells how the group of migratory swans had to undergo lots of suffering while heading for the cooler regions and how finally they found comfort and food. The legend inspires the *Lepchas* to bear courageously the difficult days hoping for a comfortable future. The day the *Lepchas* sight a migratory swan, they perform the *Kar-gnok-lok* dance in which they suggestively depict the aspects of human life in which one has to struggle hard to attain peaceful, prosperous and happy life. The dance is performed by young boys and girls, attired in colourful costumes, on various happy occasions. The dance is accompanied by songs and instrumental music provided by *Tingdar*, the drum; *Palit*, the bamboo flute; *Tambak*, the plucked string instrument; *Satsang*, the bowed string instrument; and *Romu*, the cymbals.

Gnela Kipa

Gnela Kipa is another folk dance of Sikkim. It is prevalent among the *Bhutia* tribal community. On every happy and festive occasion this dance is performed by men and women, young and old. Through this dance they express their gratitude to the great saints of the community and the sacred places. They believe that because of these sacred places situated in the region where they live and the saints born in their community who inspire piety and humility, the *Lepchas* lead such a happy life. The joyous songs that accompany the dance praise the saints and the sacred places and offer prayers for peace and happiness of the mankind. The dance is performed to celebrate the New year. It is also performed on the occasion of marriage and childbirth. The instrumental music that accompany the dance is provided by *Gno*, the drum; *Lingbu*, the bamboo flute; and *Dab-gney*, a kind of plucked string instrument.

Bardo Chham

In Arunachal Pradesh the *Shardukpen* tribal community perform *Bardo Chham* dance on festive occasions. *Bardo Chham* literally means dance of horoscopes. Dancers wearing colourful masks perform this dance indicating that the activities of living beings are watched by the gods who reward the good and punish the evil forces. A large frame drum with a long handle played with a stick provides the percussion music for the dance.

Wilang Hem

The *Konyak* tribal community of Nagaland perform *Wilang Hem* which in the past was danced with gay abandon by the triumphant warriors after their return from a battle in which they have not only defeated the enemy but have cut off the head of the leader of their enemy, which they brought home as the trophy. The dancers wear colourful traditional costumes and carry on their back baskets made of bamboo. The dancers perform to the music of indigenous drums, bamboo pipes and gongs. Now the dance is performed

on festive and happy occasions.

Zemi

The joyous dance performed by the boys and girls of the *Zemi Naga* tribal community of Meghalaya is named after the tribe, i.e., *Zemi*. It is generally danced near the Morung, the dormitory for the unmarried. The dancers wear their traditional colourful costumes. The male dancers wear a headgear decorated with feathers of hornbill. The dance movements of the boys are vigorous and while dancing they leap very high and land on the ground on the beat of the rhythm. The girls while dancing twist and turn their torso with great facility. The dance is accompanied with drums and cymbals.

Kumpitlung

Kumpitlung dance is prevalent among the *Tarao* tribal community mainly living in the Tengnoupal district of Manipur. The dance has three parts which are called (i) *Enthlona*, (ii) *Ral Lam*, and (iii) *Kathla Lam*. The *Taraos* believe that they initially lived in caves. The *Enthlona* part depicts how the community came out of the cave and what they did after that. The second part called *Ral Lam* signifies the victory of the community over their enemies. The concluding part called *Kathla Lam* is a festive dance. All the three parts may be performed one after another or at different times. Both boys and girls perform the dance wearing appropriate costume which is different for the three different parts. The dance is accompanied by a big cylindrical drum with two faces. While one face is covered with deer skin, the other, by a cow skin. The other musical instruments are : *Shananda*, a bowed variety of chordophone; a gong, an idiophone made of the horn of a *Mithun* which looks as if it is a mixture of buffalo and bullock. The musicians also sing appropriate songs for the three parts of the dance.

Dhimsa

Another festive dance prevalent in Manipur is *Dhimsa* performed by the *Kacharis*. Young boys and girls attired in their traditional colourful costumes present the dance on festive occasions. The boys and girls dance in pairs.

Musical instruments used with the dance are : *Kharam*, a long cylindrical drum with two faces; and *Meri*, a reeded wind instrument made of wood and with a very widely flared bell at the end like the French horn. It is played continuously without any break for inhalation. The *Meri* player while blowing the pipe inhales simultaneously. The mastery of playing the pipe comes after long practice. An expert *Meri* player can play continuously for hours without any break in the blowing.

Solakia

The *Pawi* and *Lakher* tribal communities, living in Chhimtuipui district of Mizoram perform *Solakia* dance. Both boys and girls participate in the dance and are guided by the leader who plays a gong to the beats of the rhythm. The stepping pattern is simple but very elegant. With the swaying movement of the body, the dancers swing their right legs towards the left delicately bending it at the knee. They take back the right leg and come forward in three rhythmic steps. Then they gracefully bend the knee and go back with three backward steps. The dancers wear their traditional ceremonial costume including a colourful headgear. Each leading dancer holds a spear and a shield followed by a dancer who brandishes a sword and slings a gun from the shoulder like a tribal hero. Accompanying percussion music is provided by long cylindrical drums, a set of gongs and cymbals.

Rasar-Kali

In Western Orissa, especially in the district of Sambalpur, a form of dance is prevalent by the name of *Rasar-kali*, which literally means a bud of aesthetic pleasure. It is very much similar to the autumnal dance named *Dalkhai* (q.v. Seasonal Dances). The only difference is that the accompanying songs use the refrain of '*rasar kali re*'. Orissa has a high concentration of tribal communities. There are 62 different tribal communities constituting about 25% of the total population. Each of the tribes has a form of recreational dance. For instance, the *Koya* tribal community living in the Malkangiri region of Koraput district of southern Orissa, perform a festive dance that is named after the tribe.

Koya

Like all tribes, the *Koyas* also love dancing and singing. No festive occasion, whether religious or social, goes without song and dance. In the festive dance the *Koya* girls forming a semicircle dance with simple yet graceful movements. Each holds in her right hand an iron rod with jingles, which is rhythmically tapped on the ground while dancing. The dancers wear brass band of about three inches wide on their head as headgear. They dance putting their right hand on the left shoulder of the nearest dancer. The percussion music is provided by a group of drummers playing slightly conical drums. The drummers are all male and they wear headgears with two bisonhorns and several strings of cowries that dangle over the face like half-mast. The drummers look exactly like those of *Bisonhorn* Marias of Madhya Pradesh, with whom the *Koyas* have cultural similarities. Both the dancers and the drummers sing while dancing.



Koya (Orissa)

Gaur

The *Gaur* dance of the *Bisonborn Marias*, who mainly live in Bastar region of Madhya Pradesh, is exactly like the *koya* dance.

Jhamta

The *Jhamta* dance of Madhya Pradesh is performed both by tribal and non-tribal communities. It is danced only by male dancers and presented at any festival or happy occasions. The dance is performed in four phases and each phase is characterized by its pattern of stepping and torso movements. The dancers sing while dancing. The songs are called *Jhamta-siring*. The percussion music of *Dhol*, *Dholak*, a smaller two-face drum, *Thimki*, bowl shaped drum, *Banshi*, the bamboo flute and *jhanj*, the Cymbals accompany the dance.

Pinnal Kolattam / Goph Gunthan / Goph

A fascinating dance of Tamil Nadu is *Pinnal Kolattam*. Almost similar dances are prevalent in Gujarat by the name of *Goph-gunthan*, and in Maharashtra,



Pinnal Kolattam (Tamilnadu)

simply *Goph*. In this dance a number of differently coloured ribbons hang down suspended from a fixture. The lower end of each ribbon is held by a dancer. Dancers holding the ribbons dance and move in such a way that a beautiful symmetrical braid of the ribbons gradually takes shape. Both melodic and percussion music accompany the dance with indigenous instruments.

Morulem

In Goa the menfolk of *Naik* (*Maratha*) community perform the dance called *Morulem* which literally means a peacock. Each of the dancers wear a peacock feather on his headgear. The dance movements, however, do not always imitate that of a peacock. It is such a popular dance in Goa that now-a-days girls also have started participating in the dance. Though danced at any time of the year, it is particularly danced during the 5 day *Shigmo* festival held in the lunar month of *Phalguna* (February/March). The dancers, along with other villagers, go to each house and dance in the open courtyard to celebrate the festival. On the last day of the festival the dance is performed at an open place in the village. The accompanying musical instruments are : *Peti*, the harmonium; *Mridanga*, a drum with two faces (often the pair of *Dugi-Tabla* is played instead of *Mridanga*); *Kansalem*, large size gong; and *Jhanj*, the cymbals.

Ghoomar

In Rajasthan *Ghoomar* is a very popular dance. There are various kinds of *Ghoomar*. Broadly, it can be divided into two kinds : that which is prevalent among the tribal communities in rural areas and that performed by non-tribal and sophisticated people mostly living in urban areas. Since *Ghoomar* literally means whirling movement, be it tribal or non-tribal *Ghumar*, turning and circular movement form the core of the dance. Among the tribal communities, the *Sanasis* and the *Bhils* have the tradition of performing *Ghoomar*. The *Sanasis* call it *Gher Ghoomar*. In the tribal *Ghoomar*, both men and women participate, but in the non-tribal kind only women perform it. In

all kinds of *Ghoomar*, the dancers wear highly pleated long skirts. When they take fast turns, the skirts take the shape of rotating umbrellas and then it becomes a feast for the eyes. While the tribal *Ghoomar* is accompanied with *Dhol*; *Jhalar*, an idiophone; and *Algoza*, a kind of double flute; the musical accompaniment for the non-tribal *Ghoomar* is provided by *Dholak*, *Nagara*, a pair of bowl shaped drums, one smaller than the other; *Shehnai*, the wind instrument; and harmonium. In all kinds of *Ghoomar*, the dancers sing while dancing.

Kalbelia

The *Kalbelia* dance of Rajasthan has now become quite popular outside the province. Actually, *Kalbelia* is a nomadic community mostly living in the



Kalbelia (Rajasthan)

Ajmer-Puskar region. Their main occupation was ensnaring snakes and selling snake venom. Now they have opted for other professions. They belong to the religious sect named *Nath*. On social and ceremonial occasions, the womenfolk of the community sing and dance, as if inspired, to the beats of *Daph*, a frame drum, and plaintive notes of *Been* (also called *Pungi*), a wind instrument made with the dried skin of a whole bottle-gourd to which two bamboo pipes, one with fingerholes, are attached to the lower end. It is a traditional musical instrument which the snake-charmers use to attract snakes. The *Kalbélia* dancers wear black embroidered skirt and blouse. While dancing they also perform some acrobatic feats.

Tera Taali

Tera Taali is a unique dance of Rajasthan. It is performed by two or



Tera Taali (Rajasthan)

three women, belonging usually to the *Kamara* community. The dancers remain seated throughout the performance. *Tera* means thirteen, and *Taali* means clapping. In the dance the clapping is done with cymbals. There are thirteen different modes of cymbal clapping and usually thirteen cymbals are tied to the different part of the dancer's body. To each hand of the dancer is tied a cymbal. The dancer strikes on the cymbals tied to the different parts of her body to the beats of the accompanying song. The dancer sits on the ground and stretches her right leg forward to which are tied cymbals at different places. The skill of moving the two hands to strike the cymbals tied to the body is indeed amazing. At times the hands are moved in such a way as to suggest milking of a cow or grinding something on the indigenous grinder made of two pieces of heavy circular stones etc. Each of the dancers balances on her head one to three pitchers all the time while performing. A male vocalist plays *Ektara*, a drone while singing the accompanying song.

Gidda

The menfolk of Punjab dance *Bhangra* (q.v. under Harvest Dances), the womenfolk perform *Gidda*. It is performed on all happy occasions like marriage and childbirth. The ceremonial *Gidda*, however is danced for consecutive twelve days in the month of July when the festival called *Teejan* of *Sawan* is held. The dance consists of singing, clapping, and enacting the *Boli*, which is one or two couplets that narrate a very wide range of subjects from household chores to the tensions between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The singing of the *boli* is punctuated with an enthusiastic refrain-phrase *Balle, Balle*. To perform *Gidda* the dancers form a circle and participants in pairs, take turns to come to the centre and sing the *boli*. Towards the end of the *boli* the pair dance with gay abandon and then return to the circle. Another pair replaces them. Thus the dance may continue for hours. Often the dance is accompanied by a *Dholak* played by one of the women participants. At times it is danced only to the clapping. *Gidda* is uniformly popular in Punjab, however, the *Gidda* of Malwa area is famous for its gusto and speed.

*Gidda (Punjab)*

Poikkal Kuthirai/Keelu Guralu

In many parts of the country dummy horse dance is performed. Already two such dances have been discussed. They are *Kachchi Ghorī* (q.v. under Social Dances) and *Chaiti Ghoda nata* (q.v. under Seasonal Dances). All the dummy horse dances, however, have elements of theatre and therefore quite entertaining. The other dummy horse dances are prevalent in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. In Tamil Nadu the dance is called *Poikkal Kuthirai*, and in Andhra Pradesh, *Keelu Guralu*. Dummy horse dance, irrespective of the region of its prevalence, is based on the same principle. Invariably the dummy horse is improvised with bamboo and cloth. The head of the horse is made with papier-mache. A tail is also attached at the other end. The body is

hollow, into which the dancer enters, as if into a cockpit. The dummy horse has no legs. When the dummy horse is lifted by the dancer and is slung from both the shoulder, it appears as if the dancer is riding a horse. The body of the dummy horse is near the waist of the dancer whose feet can be seen by the audience. The dancer dances to the beats of the accompanying music, style of which changes according to the place of its prevalence. The music draws heavily upon the folk music of the region. Singing and percussion music usually accompany the dance.

Songi Mukhawate

There are quite a few recreational dances which have pronounced theatrical elements. Therefore, they are quite entertaining. One such dance is *Songi Mukhawate* of Maharashtra. Although it has religious associations and connected rituals, the theatrical elements come to the fore. It is customarily performed as an integral part of the worship of *Devi* (mother goddess) on the full moon night of the lunar month of *Chaitra* (March/April). The dance celebrates the victory of truth over falsehood. The name of the dance is derived from the two lion masks worn by two dancers who represent *Narasimha*, an aspect of Lord Vishnu. The dancers in the role of *Kal Bhairav* and *Betal* also wear masks. The other dancers perform holding sticks in their hands. *Dhol*, *Pawari*, and *Sambal* are the main musical instruments used in this dance. The *Pawari* players wear green costume and peacock feathers on their headgears.

Vaghya-Murali

Another entertaining dance of Maharashtra, with dominating theatrical elements, is *Vaghya-Murali*. This dance too has religious associations. The dance recapitulates the tradition of Marathas to worship their weapons on the eve of Dussera festival, in the name of Lord Malhari, who is considered to be an aspect of Lord Shiva. The name of the dance is derived from the terms *Vaghya*, the male actor-dancers and *Murali*, the female dancers who used to be dedicated to Lord Shiva in the past. A duet between the *Vaghya* and the *Murali* develops into a full fledged dance to the accompaniment of percussion instruments and bells.

Singhi Chham

In Sikkim the interesting dance called *Singhi Chham* is performed. It has also religious associations. Mount *Khang-chen-Dzong-pa* (Kanchenjunga) the third largest mountain in the world is sacred to the people of Sikkim as their guardian deity. As decreed by Guru Rimpche (Guru Padmasambhava), this majestic mountain stands guard over the land, holding within its crevices the sacred Five Treasures. Its associate peaks look like the legendary Snow Lion, fierce and fiery with its gorgeous mane hues in turquoise. The Snow Lion is considered an important cultural symbol of the state and is elaborately depicted in the *Singhi Chham* or the Snow Lion dance. Usually two or four dummy lions perform the dance. Each dummy Snow Lion is made of white fur and the face is bluish. Actually, it is total mask made of cloth and fur. Two



Singhi Chham (Sikkim)

dancers get into each lion mask and position themselves inside the mask in such a way that the Snow Lion looks somewhat like a real lion. The legs of the dancer positioned on the front become the two forelegs of the lion and the two legs of the dancer positioned at the back form the hindlegs. With amazing synchronization the two dancers move so that the movement of the Snow Lion appears realistic. Only a drum is used with the dance.

Puliyattam

In Tamil Nadu *Puliyattam* is prevalent which has the overtone of theatricality. *Puli* means a tiger, and *Attam* means dance. *Puliyattam* (tiger-dance) is performed mainly in the districts of Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli. Men of usually good build, wearing mask and painting their entire body with dots and stripes, appear as tigers in human form. A powerful drum music is the only accompaniment with the dance. Some of the dance movements are inspired by those of tigers. The *Puliyattam* is performed usually at village festivals.

Paos Jagoi

In Manipur a fascinating dance called *Paos Jagoi* is performed. It is associated with an equally fascinating *Meitei* (Manipuri language and its old culture) myth which is as follows :

God Atinga Shidaba had three sons; Amiba, Ashiba, and Achiba. He asked his sons to create the Universe. When Amiba began the creation, Ashiba destroyed it, not once but thrice. God Shidaba thought that unless he creates someone who can help Amiba, the creation of the Universe will never be complete. Therefore, he created Nongthangleima, a beautiful girl from his eyes and advised her to help Amiba. When Ashiba, who is also known as Pakhangba, saw the beautiful girl, he changed his destructive attitude and wanted to marry Nongthangleima. She spurned the advances of Ashiba and cooperated with Amiba to complete the creation of the Universe. God Shidaba was very pleased to see the beautiful Universe and

granted a boon to both of them to be born as lovers generation after generation. Amiba was born as Ningthou and Nongthangleima as Panthoibi. As ordained by God Shidaba, she came searching for Ningthou. When the two met they remembered the sweet days they had while creating the Universe. They were so overjoyed to be once again together that they started dancing which was called *Paos Jagoi*. The dance is performed to perpetuate the love of Ningthou and Panthoibi.

While dancing the male and the female dancers exchange loving words through singing. The dancers wear gorgeous costumes which are prescribed for the dance. The accompanying music is provided by *Pung*, the drum with two faces; *Pena*, a simple bowed string instrument; *Banshi*, bamboo flute; *Senbung*, a large gong; and *Taal*, the cymbals.

Chhau

In Eastern India, in the States of Orissa, Bihar, and West Bengal, about a dozen differing styles of dance are prevalent under the generic name of *Chhau*. To differentiate one from the other, the name of the district where it is prevalent is prefixed. The three representative styles are called *Mayurbhanj Chhau*, prevalent in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa; *Seraikela Chhau*, which is prevalent in *Seraikela* sub-division in Bihar; and *Purulia Chhau*, prevalent in Purulia district of West Bengal. The main difference among the various *Chhau* styles is in the use of masks. While some styles use mask, others do not. The *Seraikela* and *Purulia* styles of *Chhau* use masks. The *Seraikela* masks are more sophisticated and the *Purulia* masks are more theatrical. The *Mayurbhanj Chhau* does not use mask. The similarities among the varying styles of *Chhau* are :

1. Style of typical leg extensions are almost similar;
2. All the *Chhau* dances are customarily performed as a part of *Chaitra Parba*, a festival held on the last day of the lunar month of *Chaitra* (March/April).



Chhau (West Bengal)

3. Musical instruments used are the same. They are : *Dhol*, the barrel shaped drum with two faces; *Dhumsa* or *Dhak*, a kind of huge kettledrum; and *Mahuri*, the reeded wind instrument like *Shehnai*, but with a sharper timbre.

Because of the generous and enthusiastic patronage of the erstwhile princely states, the *Mayurbhanj* and *Seraikela* styles of *Chhau* are highly evolved and have all the desired elements of a classical dance. *Purulia Chhau*, although less evolved, is highly dramatic and the most vigorous of all styles of *Chhau*.

In absence of clear evidences, there are differing opinions on the origin of *Chhau* dances. One that appears most reasonable is that they have evolved

out of the martial crafts. The earliest number in the repertoire of *Mayurbhanj Chhau* is *Ruk-maar-nacha* which literally means the dance of attack and defence. Similarly, the base of *Seraikela Chhau* is *Phari-Khanda Khela*, meaning the play of sword and shield. Each number of *Purulia Chhau* culminates in a confrontation between two warriors. Two forms of folk dance still surviving in some of the remote villages in Orissa, which have leg extensions exactly like that of *Chhau*, are *Paikali* (q.v. under Game and Martial Dances) and *Amdalia-Jamdalia Nacha* in which the dancers decorate themselves with and dance holding small branches of mango and jamun (a kind of deeply purple coloured plum) trees. In some of the numbers in these two forms of dance masks without eyeholes are used. Surely these two dances are the precursor of *Chhau*.

With masks the *Seraikela Chhau* takes fantasy to the summit of poetry, where beauty is distilled from a world of magnificent dreams; and *Purulia Chhau* vibrates with a theatricality that makes our myths palpable. Without mask the movements of *Mayurbhanj Chhau* become visual poetry of stormy passion gestured in a style that is free, intense, and affluent; a poem that is ablaze with Nature—her storms, her volcanoes, her rivers, and her lagoons.

The dances discussed in this book are by no means exhaustive. It is well-nigh impossible to be exhaustive in discussing Indian folk dances. We have not included any dance which we have not watched carefully. A few dances have been discussed under two categories, because the character of the dances is such that they did not come clearly under one category. We feel that we have just swam over the vast ocean of Indian folk dances. At times, we tried to dive deeper, but we found it fascinatingly fathomless.

India has a wide range of folk dance tradition. Scores of differing styles of folk dances are surviving in each of the around thirty different cultural regions of the country. This book enumerates and elucidates the vast body of folk dances of India according to the basic character or particular occasion of performance of the dance.

The author, Jiwan Pani was an exponent of folk art and culture. He wrote several books on the folk arts of India.



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